No. 304 / AUGUST 1998

THE
NI
NEW INTERNATION

The cocoa chain

A farmer's bittersweet journey

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COMING NEXT MONTH

Migration

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I came, I saw, I went – Africans speak about their experiences of the West

Fortress Europe – racism and anti-immigration pound the shores of Spain

Maid in the US – female migrants serve the rich, who don't support their rights

Closed shop – New Zealand's bizarre government policy allows educated migrants in but denies them jobs

Modern slavery – reports from Thailand reveal the traffic in women makes more money than drugs or weapons

Multiculturalism – a Canadian migrant's view on how rhetoric fails to match reality

ANDREW KILVERT

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The New Internationalist exists to report on the issues of world poverty and inequality; to focus attention on the unjust relationship between the powerful and powerless in both rich and poor nations; to debate and campaign for the radical changes necessary within and between those nations if the basic material and spiritual needs of all are to be met; and to bring to life the people, the ideas and the action in the fight for world development.

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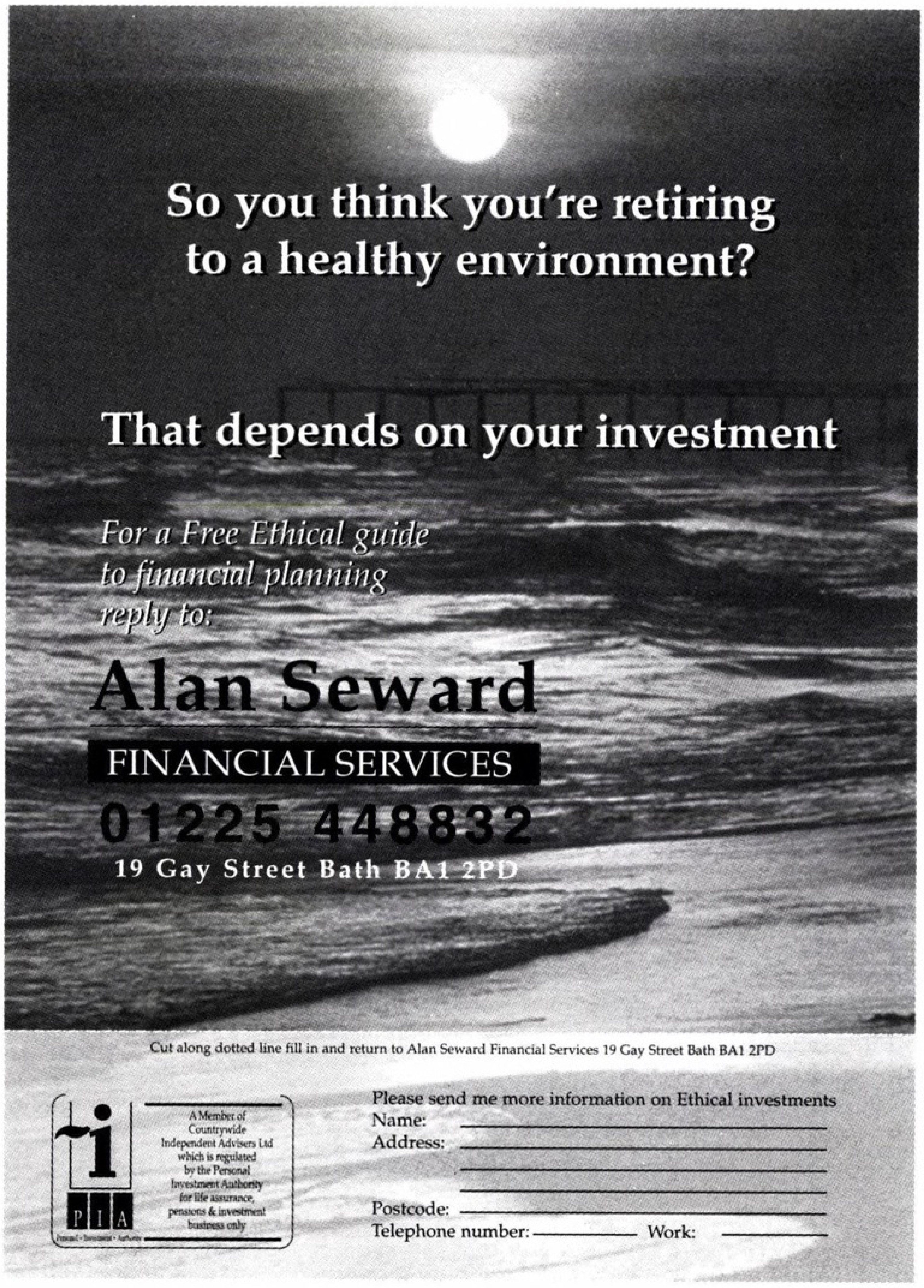

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FRONT COVER PHOTO BY **SARA ERRINGTON**.
MAGAZINE DESIGNED BY **IAN NIXON**.

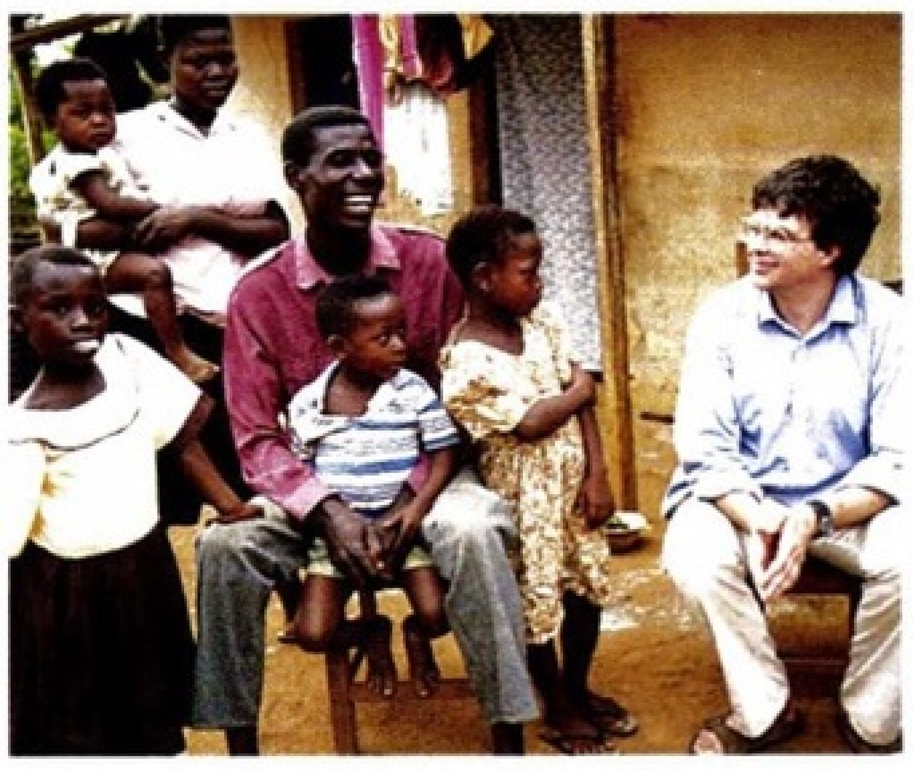
THIS MONTH'S **THEME**

The cocoa chain

FROM THIS MONTH'S **EDITOR**

DOING an issue where you visit the other side of the world in order to get the story is largely dependent on the kindness of strangers. Without support from people in Ghana, who have little obvious reason to give it, this magazine about the journey from cocoa to chocolate would not have been possible. It's not just a question of solidarity, although a common sense of struggle for justice is a good start; it is also the basic decency and openness of Ghanaians and their willingness to share of themselves.

One of the frustrations of this kind of work is that one never gets the opportunity to say a simple 'thank you', because so many are called for. So the 'thank you' has to be the magazine itself and whether it gets to grips with people's lives on the cocoa chain, with what is important to them. I would like to thank especially Twin Trading and Green and Black's for their contacts and insight. I would also like to thank the people at the Canadian NGO CUSO office in Accra for easing my way into Ghanaian life.



This issue on chocolate is the first issue I have ever written entirely by myself. Oddly I have never been a big fan of chocolate. Some things you like, others you don't, I figured. But preparing this issue of the **NI** has changed my mind. It turns out that my experience of chocolate – milky, sugary candy bars, often with gooey centres of some unspecified substance – had very little chocolate in it. If, that is, by 'chocolate' you mean something largely derived from cocoa – the essential raw material, after all, that defines what chocolate is. In the course of working on this issue I got to pay attention to the real thing – Golden Tree in Ghana, fair-traded Green and Black's in Britain, special Mexican powder for making drinks and a range of other fair-traded products, most with a cocoa content high above that of the leading brand bars pushed by the big chocolate companies. I gradually began to develop a taste for it, despite myself. The rich chocolate taste dominates, not the cloying sweetness or some other artificial variant. While I probably don't yet qualify as a chocoholic – despite an addictive personality – it is safe to say that I have become a chocolate snob.

The indifference with which I once passed candy counters has now changed to a self-righteous sneering. I look down my nose, occasionally stopping to scoff at the pathetic amount of cocoa in this or that popular candy brand. Junk food really! All this is, of course, buttressed by political correctness on my part: the cocoa farmers I meet in Ghana, or their like elsewhere in the world, will do much better from a fair-traded, high-cocoa product than the confections of Big Chocolate. It's nice when you can get such a good fit between what is right and what you like.

Richard Swift

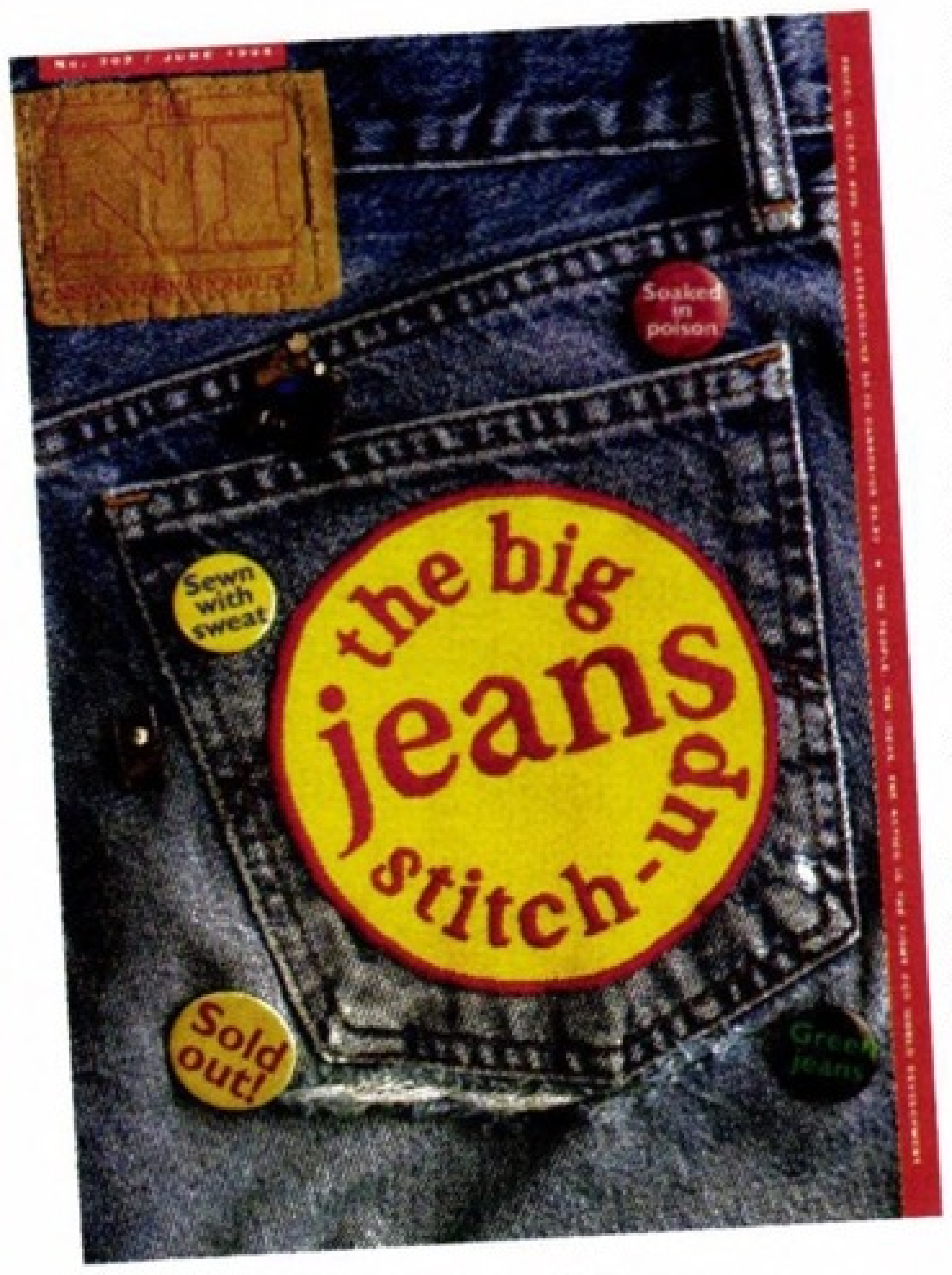
Richard Swift
for the ***New Internationalist*** *Co-operative*

Letters

The New Internationalist welcomes your letters. But please keep them short. They may be edited for purposes of space or clarity. Include a home telephone number if possible and send your letters to the nearest editorial office. The address and e-mail are inside the front cover.

Total indifference

I do appreciate your magazine but I was sorry to read in **NI 302** on blue jeans, under the title 'Pesticide suicide', the story of the cotton farmers of Andhra Pradesh in India, related in such a heartless and incomplete way. Many more than 20 farmers committed suicide: on 12 January there had already been 50 suicides and they were still taking place at least until the end of February. Farmers swallowed pesticides or jumped into wells.



Maybe one of these suicides 'grabbed' the headline as your journalist says, but almost every day the facts were reported in the local newspaper. Misled by local government, cheated by pesticide- and seed-vendors, forced to borrow money at prohibitive interest rates… And all this in a climate of total indifference.

This is a tragedy that went almost unnoticed, presumably because of other greater tragedies. But can you imagine the commotion in Europe if this happened to one of our artichoke farmers?

Katherine Carré
Versailles, France

Label campaign

Your issue on **Jeans** (**NI 302**) provided a welcome insight into conditions on the global factory floor. It is essential, however, that a better-informed public should also be given the means to express its concern and respond practically. 'Labour Behind the Label' is a UK version of some 10 European campaigns formed to raise public awareness of the issues and put pressure on companies to improve working conditions. It has just produced a card which people can send to clothes companies asking them to adopt codes of conduct based on the UN Conventions on workers' rights and to accept independent monitoring of working conditions among their suppliers.

UK readers can obtain the card from Labour Behind the Label, 38 Exchange St, Norwich NR2 1AX.

Chantal Finney
Norwich, England

Women in Cuba

What a pity Wayne Ellwood didn't have a feminist companion on his travels in Cuba (**NI 301**). He missed a golden opportunity to examine the real gains which the Revolution has brought for women. For example, an in-depth interview with Vilma Espin of the Cuban Women's Federation (FMC) might have highlighted both the ways in which women have made enormous progress since 1959 and the resistance there has been to women's genuine equality with men.

Cuba has made tremendous progress through its revolution. If ever there is to be a revolution in the relations between women and men, we need to know how it's to be brought about. A feminist consciousness at work during the research for this issue would have addressed this most fundamental of inequalities and had something worthwhile to report on Cuban women's experience.

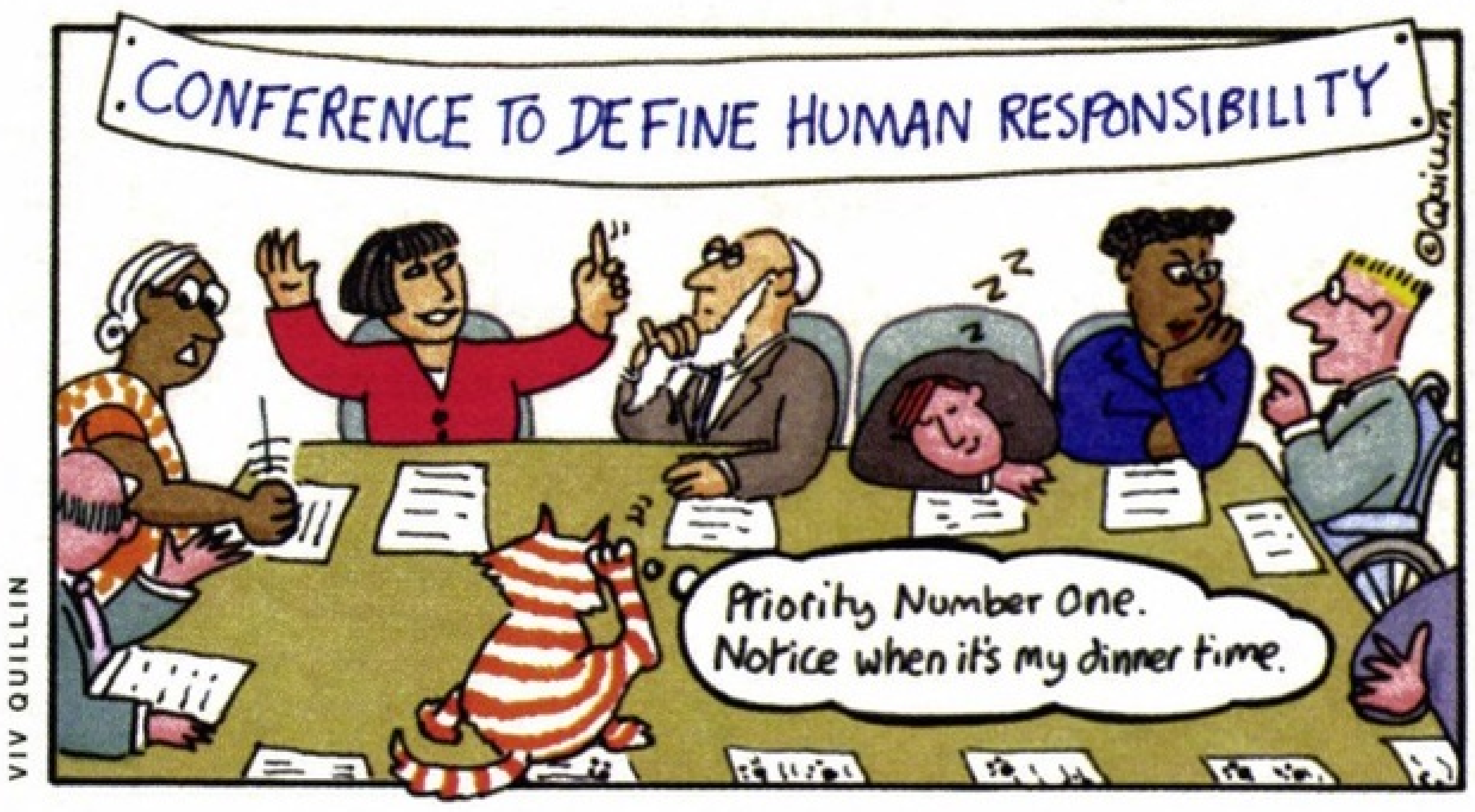
Ruth Margerison
Christchurch, Aotearoa/New Zealand

Raison d'être

I write in response to Richard Bryant-Jefferies letter (**NI 300**). I too feel a focus on responsibility is long overdue.

For example, Amnesty International recently accepted Mr Blair's signature for the 'Get up, Sign up' Campaign. However, days later, Mr Blair and Mr Clinton debated the destruction of thousands of Iraqi lives. Noam Chomsky has stated that if the Nuremberg Laws had been correctly applied every US President since the Second World War should have been imprisoned. These examples serve to highlight that human rights are not viewed as an individual as well as a collective endeavour. Surely our responsibility is greater than merely mouthing support for the less fortunate? In order to ensure that responsibility is more than lofty rhetoric we need to become active ourselves. But what then do we consider appropriate enactment of human rights both on our doorsteps and beyond our borders? Do we consider it beyond the scope of the individual but firmly within the jurisdiction of the State? Should we act as individuals within our limited means leaving to hope, charity and government the resolution of larger issues? Or assert that as 'rights and responsibilities' are a critical shadow dance, human responsibility should be the raison d'être for any and all human-rights declarations? I think we should.

Mitch Lawson
Burgess Hill, England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Iranian veils

The photo that you printed (**NI 300** page 9) of 'women in Teheran trying to navigate kerbs and potholes via the tiny "permissible" slit in their "veils"' is pure fiction. I suspect it was not even taken in Iran. I recently lived there for a year and there is no such rule. No-one in Iran is required to cover their face.

If you wanted to search for women going out with their faces covered you can find them here in Egypt, no doubt forced by family pressures or stupid husbands; in Pakistan too – but that doesn't mean it is required by state law.

I don't need to remind you of the gullible trust that most people have in the printed word. Has it come to the point where the Western press can print any rubbish and get away with it if they are writing about Muslims?

Nafisa Abdelsadek
Cairo, Egypt

***Editor:** we have checked with the library that supplied the photo, Rex Features, who confirm that the photo was taken in Teheran in 1985. There is no legal requirement for women to be veiled in this way.*

Crippling debt

The leaders at the G8 summit of rich nations in Birmingham made pitiful progress on the issue of debt relief for poor countries. Do they fully comprehend the extent to which debt is crippling developing nations and condemning them to an irreversible future of poverty? During the period from the 1980s through to 1997 the debt load of developing countries has doubled from $1.1 trillion to a stunning $2.3

trillion dollars. According to the World Bank, 40 countries, most of them in Africa, are heavily indebted and in fact spend more than half of their nations' budgets on debt interest. Mozambique spends more on debt interest than it does on health, education, policing and its justice system. In this extremely poor country, where 200,000 children die every year from the effects of poverty, two-thirds of money that comes in from foreign donors goes right back out to foreign banks.

When over 12 million poor children in the world die every year mostly from preventable diseases and malnutrition, who are we kidding? Debt is causing poverty in the Third world and without debt-forgiveness these countries have no hope of recovering and growing into healthy trading nations with stable economies.

Karen Hodgson
Victoria, Canada

Best system?

It amazes me that people can read the **NI** and still think capitalism is 'the best system we have' (*Letters* **NI 300**). The issue on **Mining** (**NI 299**) for example, showed just how far capitalism is prepared to go. Huge multinational corporations, more powerful than most governments, raping the earth and condemning people to misery, all in the endless pursuit of profit for the shareholders.

If this is the best system we have – God help us!

Jo Makepeace
Brighton, England

TOPIC TIME

We are holding our annual meeting to decide on topics for next year's issues. If you have ideas that you would like to send in, please send in a paragraph (not one line and not three pages!) on each proposal to Nikki van der Gaag in Oxford by October 15th. You can post it or e-mail me on nikkivdg@newint.org

The views expressed on the letters page are not necessarily those of the New Internationalist.

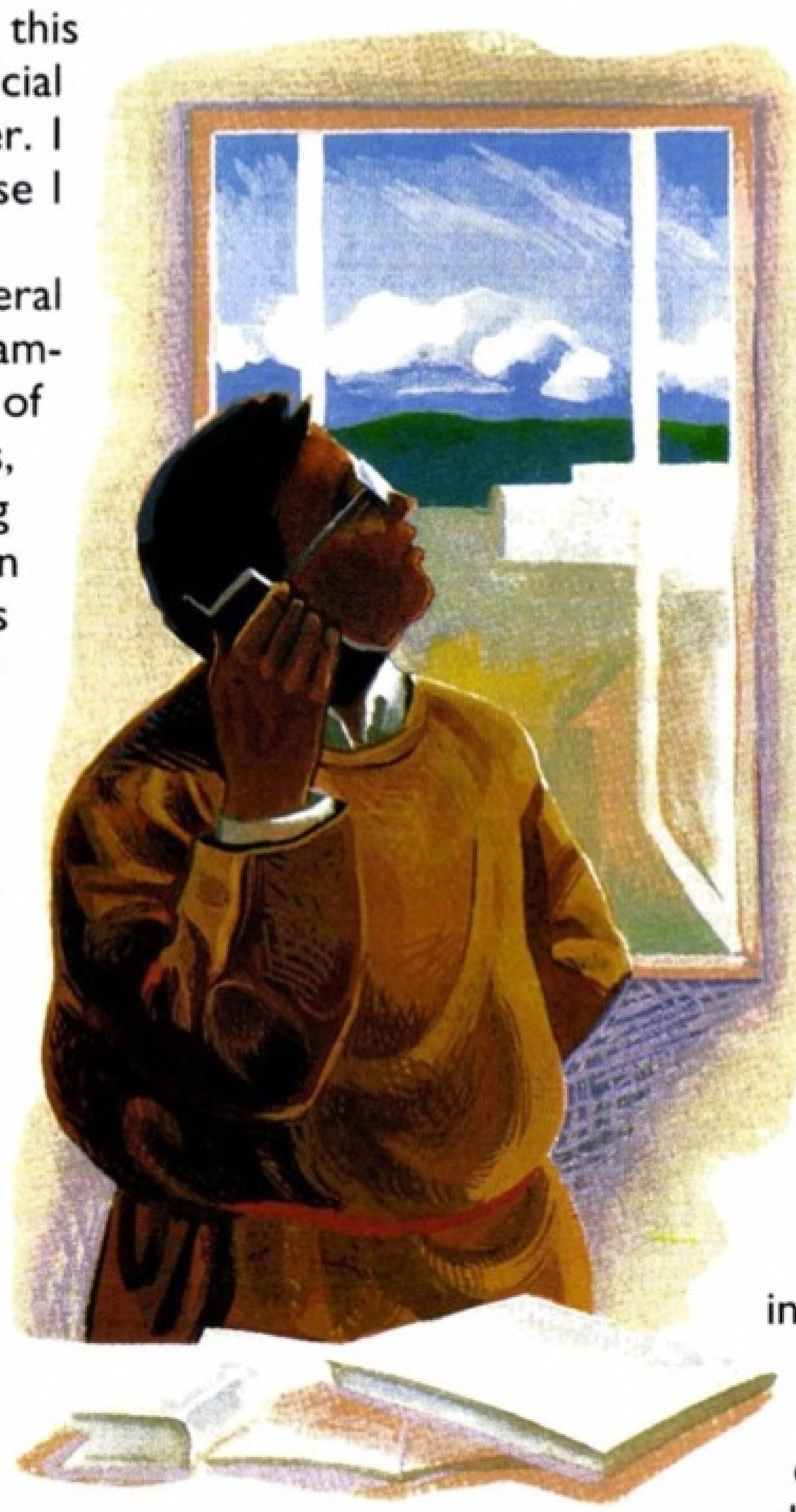
Letter from Mongolia

Secrets and skies

Louisa Waugh gives secret lessons to a government official and ends up drinking vodka with his family.

It all had to be kept very quiet. No-one, certainly no other government official, was to know about my dealings with Sumiya. The daily visits were discreet. Sumiya's driver would pick me up at home and whisk me to the fifth-floor Ulaanbaatar apartment where Sumiya would be waiting. Two or three hours later I would quietly leave and Sumiya would either return to his government office (which I never saw) or start his homework.

I never really understood why our English lessons had to be kept such a secret. All I was told was that Sumiya had applied for a masters in economics in England and I had just six weeks to turn this senior government official into a fluent English speaker. I only agreed to do it because I was broke.


SARAH JOHN

Sumiya and I spent several hours a day poring over grammar books and copies of English-language test papers, while the old ladies sitting on the wooden benches in the sunshine outside his block gossiped about my visits.

His mobile phone was initially welded to his left hand, but after five lessons I banned 'that damn phone' and my 37-year-old student meekly gave in.

This large courteous Mongolian, who trained in Hungary and speaks five languages, told me on our first meeting: 'my wife is good looking, so you see I am fat man.'

He introduced his wife, Enerel, and the four kids, took me out for dinner and dedicated himself (when his mobile phone wasn't beeping) to hastily mastering the English language.

Sumiya's older kids study in Europe, his wife works in a Western embassy and the whole family hoards foreign gadgets. But Sumiya confided in me that he visited a local *lama* (Buddhist priest) to receive inspiration in his English studies and, out of the office, he often wears the traditional Mongol *deel* — a calf-length silk tunic buttoned down the right side.

After a month of lessons, Sumiya asked me to spend a weekend in the countryside with his family. 'A few old friends' would be visiting, but, he assured me, we would cram all weekend. I had my doubts. Mongolians drink vodka at any get-together. But I love the countryside and I liked Sumiya and his good-looking wife, so I was persuaded to join them.

Even as we drove out of Ulaanbaatar, the beer cans were popping. The driver swilled away and Sumiya caught my eye and said sheepishly: 'maybe no lesson today, but you can give me worst test tomorrow.' I had to laugh. We drove 50 kilometres, stopping to circle a sacred cairn, blessing our drunken journey.

We arrived in a cool green valley just before a purple and orange sunset. We camped in a traditional Mongol felt *ger*, friends arrived and I gave in and got wasted with the rest of them. I slept with Sumiya's family cozily sardined together on several large mattresses and, after a late-night pee outside, drifted into a peaceful drunken stupor.

I woke early, remembered where I was and sat up in my sleeping bag. My pupils dilated — the ger floor and walls were littered with corpses. Large sections of a sheep were hanging from the wooded ger supports. Five dead marmots (large hay-coloured rodents) were casually strewn on the floor — one with its throat missing. Lunch and dinner had been caught.

Sumiya and I sat outside in the brilliant sunshine practising adverbs while Enerel and the kids pottered about the ger. The valley was decked in wild flowers and the herders next door (well, nearby) were milking their mares and fermenting the milk which they drank fresh and warm. It was idyllic.

Sumiya and his family were definitely city folk on a rural weekend. They drove their white Korean saloon car into the distance to go to the bathroom and 15-year-old Nara screamed when she was finally persuaded to mount a horse.

But they all tucked into the pungent flame-roasted marmot meat and that night our ger echoed with a crowd of voices singing beloved ancient Mongolian laments.

Two weeks later Sumiya took and passed his English test (his mobile phone was forcibly removed after disturbing the beginning of the exam). After a flurry of phone calls about the climate, customs and student life in England, he and Enerel were off. But only for a year — Sumiya and his globetrotting family can only live under Mongolia's piercing blue sky. ■

Louisa Waugh is a freelance writer who lives and works in Mongolia.

Update

TIBET

Deity banned

Outrage as Dalai Lama denounces Dorje Shugden

BUDDHISTS picketed the Dalai Lama's recent visit to the United States and Europe. They protested against the ban on the worship of the 350-year-old deity, Dorje Shugden, whom they say is one of the most revered in the Buddhist religion. In 1996 the Dalai Lama announced that worship of Dorje Shugden was banned and explained that his oracle, Nechung, had advised him that the deity was a threat to his personal safety and the future of Tibet.

The Tibetan Government-in-exile said its employees must stop worshipping the deity or be sacked. The office of the Dalai Lama told the superiors of the Sermey Monastic College in Bylakuppe, India: 'If there is anyone who continues to worship Dorje (Shugden), make a list of their names, birthplace and class... Keep the original and send us a copy of the list.'

According to PK Dey, a human-rights lawyer from Delhi: 'Those worshipping Shugden are experiencing tremendous harassment. It is not in a particular part of the country, but everywhere there are Tibetans. Dalai Lama supporters are going from house to house searching.' For example, in Clementown, India, the house of a family of Shugden worshippers was stoned and then firebombed. Wanted posters describe people believed to be Shugden leaders as the top ten enemies of the state. The posters have been put up in monasteries, settlements and in Dharamsala by the Government-in-exile's Department of Security.

Dorje Shugden worshippers say the ban and its implementation are in direct conflict with the proposed constitution of a free Tibet, laid down by the Dalai Lama in 1963. The constitution states that all religious denominations are equal before the law, and every Tibetan shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. But when Dorje Shugden worshippers challenged the ban, the Tibetan Government-in-exile stated that: 'Concepts like democracy and freedom of religion are empty when it comes to the well-being of the Dalai Lama and the common cause of Tibet.'

DORJE SHUGDEN COALITION

"Dalai Lama, Please Give Religious Freedom"
"Dalai Lama, please give religious freedom."
"I keep thinking: if only I was already dead!"
This ban, however, stabs us right in our h

Angry Tibetans picket the Dalai Lamas's visit to New York.

During recent peace vigils a petition with 15,000 signatures was handed to the Dalai Lama stating the need for all Tibetan traditions to flourish. Protesters asked him to sign a declaration of freedom to worship Dorje Shugden. The Dalai Lama refused.

He says that he banned the worship of Dorje Shugden because it is a divisive deity that causes sectarianism among his followers, and is leading to the degeneration of Buddhism. But in doing so he has left many Tibetans confused. Gonsar Rinpoche, a Tibetan Lama who has worshipped Dorje Shugden throughout his life, says: 'I cannot accept this ban on Shugden. If I accept that all my wise and great masters are demon worshippers, then their teachings are wrong, everything they believe in is wrong. That is not possible.'

Sara Chamberlain

US property – Cotton seeds are patented.

JORGEN SCHYTTE / STILL PICTURES

Terminator

Genetic engineering will make cotton seeds sterile, under a new patent. The world's largest producers of cotton seeds, Delta and Pine Land, in conjunction with the US Department of Agriculture, have patented the process of seed reproduction. This means that each year farmers will have to buy new seeds from these companies instead of planting local seeds from the year before, creating further costs for poor farmers. The patented process has been named the Terminator.

For further information contact
the Rural Advancement Foundation International (RAFI):
Tel: +1 613 567 6880 Fax: +1 613 567 6884
email: rafican@rafi.ca

Green bullets?

The US Department of Defense (DOD) is developing 'environmentally friendly' munitions and weapons, including less toxic alternatives to lead bullets, missiles that spew less exhaust, and a paintless coating for fighter aircraft that will reduce dependence on paints and strippers containing hazardous chemicals.

'Green' bullets could save the Army up to $20 million a year and will reduce the problem of lead-contaminated soil at the firing ranges. But Sherri Goodman from the DOD assures that the military is not becoming an organization of tree-hugging pacifisits: 'None of these efforts to green our weapons systems will reduce their performance.'

Mother Jones/March-April 1998.

PIERS BENATAR / PANOS PICTURES

Sexist Sarin

'Nerve gas' has greater long-term effects on women than it does on men, according to a study of the victims of a sarin attack at Tokyo's underground. When the Aum Shinrikyo cult exposed commuters to the gas, 12 died and more than 6,000 became ill. A study, conducted a few months after the attack, of 640 sarin victims revealed no health problems. Then, six to eight months after exposure to sarin, the women could not stand up straight with their eyes closed. Men wobbled no more than usual. Researchers suspect women's brains are more sensitive to the disturbance of the region which controls balance and that sarin gas damages this area.

New Scientist No 2121

ZIMBABWE

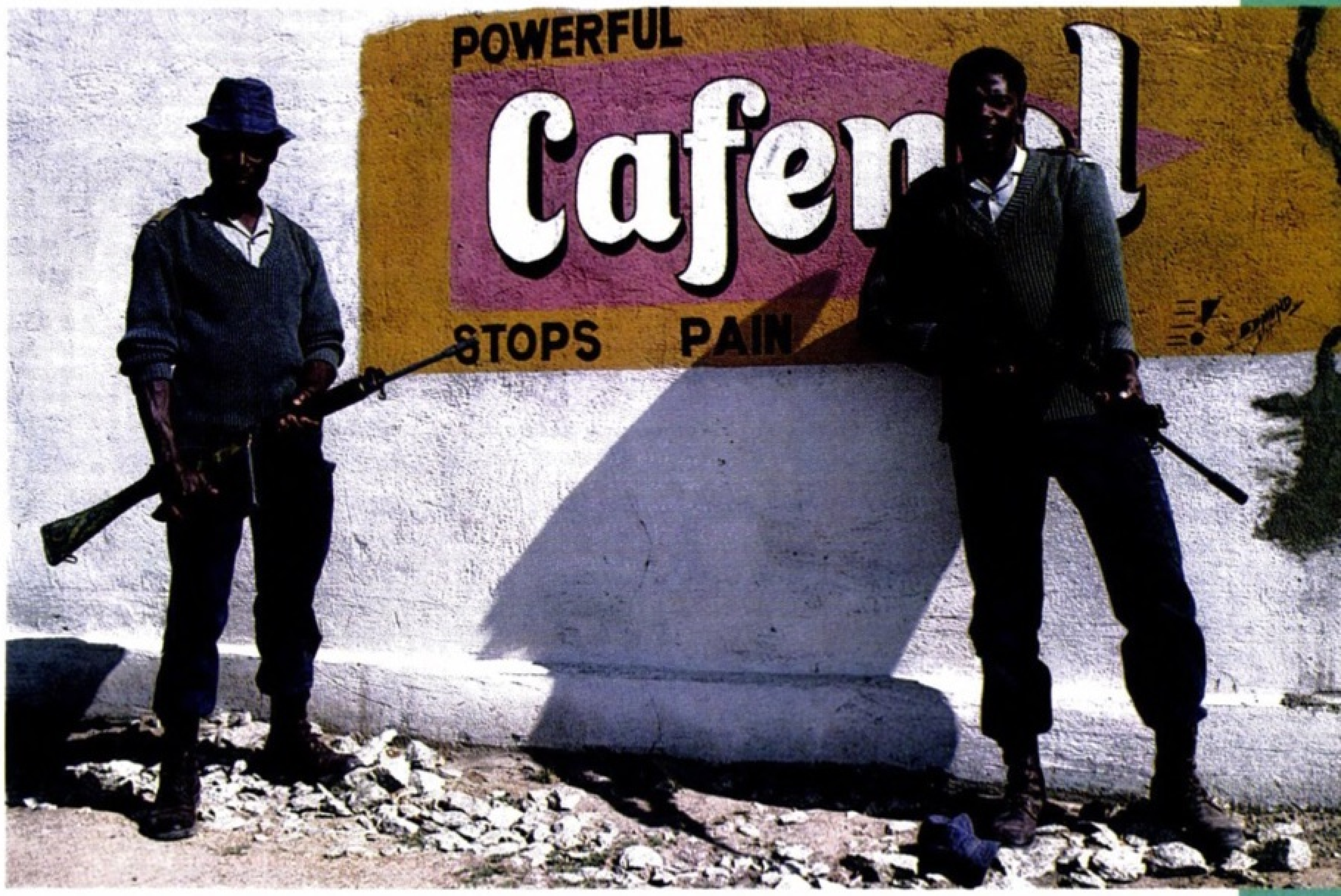
Remember me

Activists call for action against police violence

MOREMEMORIES Chawira, a student seriously wounded by an officer's bullet during a Harare University protest, may prove to be the source of bad memories for local police. Zimbabwe's police are under attack for allegedly using excessive force in handling the growing number of demonstrations over food price and tax increases.

Chawira was shot in the neck when police tear-gassed and then opened fire on a recent peaceful protest against the proposed privatization of the university catering and accommodation services. The incident fueled the reputation of the force as trigger-happy.

The Association of University Teachers condemned the police shooting and said it was concerned for the safety of people on campuses 'when armed police next flout proper procedures'. The Association's President, Dr Ian Love, said: 'Chawira did not provoke the police, but was merely fleeing from the tear gas that had been fired by the police into the student union building which houses the central catering services.'


POWERFUL
Cafen
STOPS PAIN

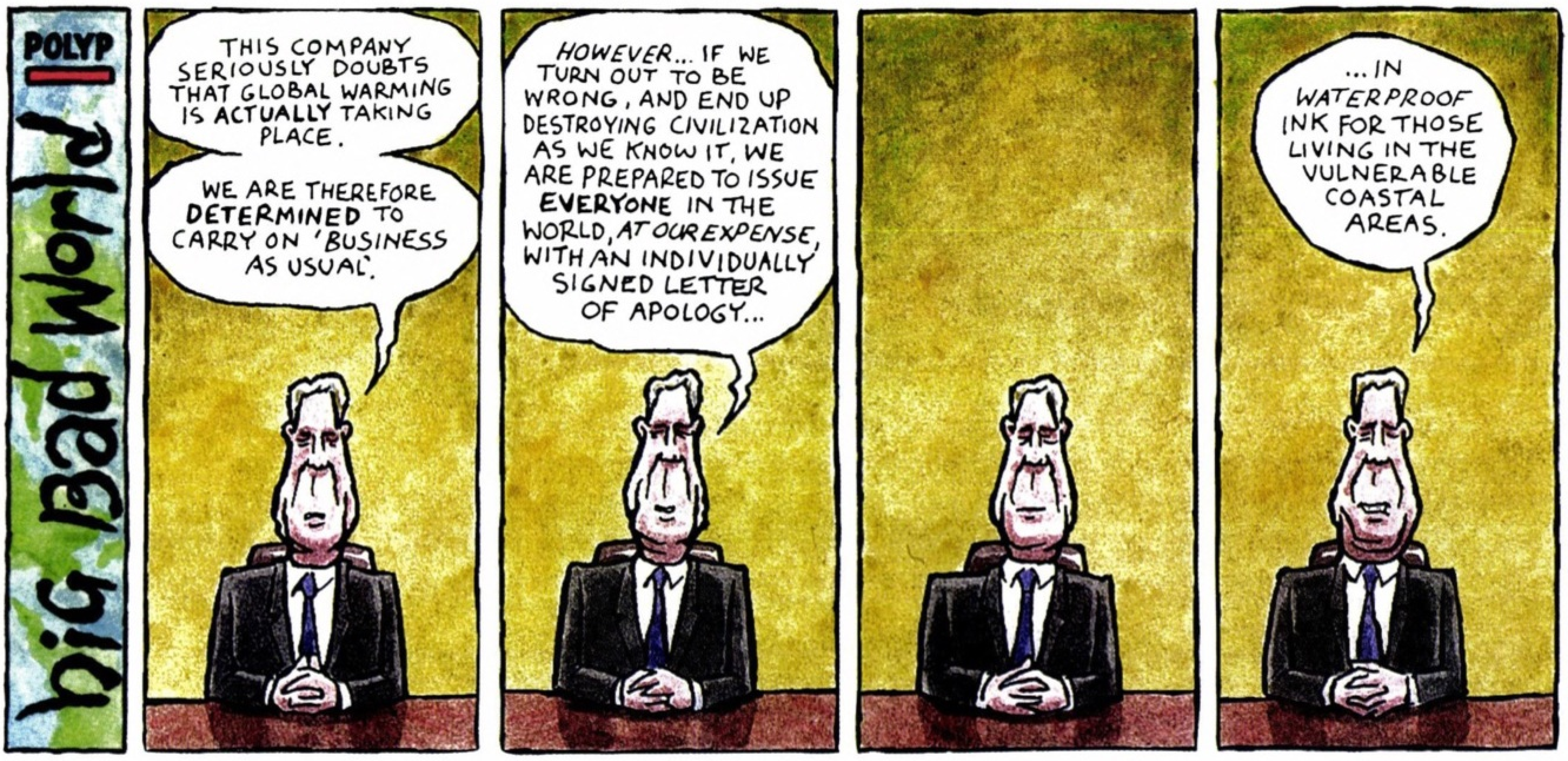
TRYGVE BØLSTAD / PANOS PICTURES

Under fire – Zimbabwe's 'trigger-happy' police are in trouble again.

There have been other violent confrontations at tertiary institutions. In January at least five people were killed in protests over steep rises in the price of food. Eight died and some were wounded by police bullets, according to human-rights groups. The police admitted one of the shootings – of a 10-year-old girl from Gweru. Witnesses say she was shot while perched in a tree watching the food riots. Police say she was hit when warning shots were fired in the air. Further evidence of police brutality was aired by the Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation, which showed footage of officers using batons to beat people in disturbances at the National Sports Stadium.

Zimbabwe was removed at the last minute from the list of African countries recently visited by Bill Clinton. This was widely perceived as a signal of displeasure by the US over the way the authorities handled the January food riots. Britain has come under pressure to review its aid program which is to continue supplying equipment, including 1,500 Land Rovers, to the Zimbabwe police.

Leopold Hatugari/Gemini News Service.


POLYP
big Bad World
THIS COMPANY SERIOUSLY DOUBTS THAT GLOBAL WARMING IS ACTUALLY TAKING PLACE.
WE ARE THEREFORE DETERMINED TO CARRY ON 'BUSINESS AS USUAL'.
HOWEVER... IF WE TURN OUT TO BE WRONG, AND END UP DESTROYING CIVILIZATION AS WE KNOW IT, WE ARE PREPARED TO ISSUE EVERYONE IN THE WORLD, AT OUR EXPENSE, WITH AN INDIVIDUALLY SIGNED LETTER OF APOLOGY...
...IN WATERPROOF INK FOR THOSE LIVING IN THE VULNERABLE COASTAL AREAS.

Update

INTERNATIONAL AID

Battered projects

Environmental agency under attack

The Global Environmental Facility (GEF), an environmental aid agency, has attracted criticism. Even the agencies that supervise its projects – the World Bank, the UN Development Program and the UN Environment Program – rate 12 per cent of GEF projects as 'unsatisfactory'.

Since the Earth Summit in Rio, the GEF was adopted as the main source of funding for the projects arising from the UN conventions on biological diversity and climate change. Since then, with $1.6 billion donated by 34 countries, it has approved 230 projects throughout Asia, the Pacific, sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean.

Cameroon's lesson – aid does not protect rainforest.

MARK EDWARDS / STILL PICTURES

Now an internal assessment cites the GEF Cameroon project as a failure. In 1995 developed nations agreed to invest $17 million over four years in the project to manage and improve Cameroon's biodiversity. The internal assessment concludes the project is poorly conceived, badly managed and plagued by 'incessant bickering and resentment over administrative failures'.

It was supposed to protect six different ecological areas in Cameroon, but there is no consistency in the conservation methods used in the different areas. And because few data on the species were collected at the start, there is no way to judge progress.

Developing countries say that the weakness of the GEF is that it addresses environmental problems of concern to the West. Anil Agarwal, Director of the Centre of Science and Environment in New Delhi, says the fund should listen to the right people. 'The GEF is focusing mainly on government institutions and underemphasizing the role of small NGOs and community groups.' And developing countries have dismissed the funding provided to the GEF as merely 'chewing gum', saying that around $125 billion dollars are needed.

An explicit aim of establishing the fund was to force organizations involved to adopt environmental sustainability. It was hoped the World Bank would think twice before investing in development projects that damage the environments GEF is supposed to protect. But between 1993 and 1997 the Bank invested $9.4 billion in fossil-fuel projects that will accelerate climate change, and less than $300 million on schemes to prevent it.

In Cameroon the World Bank is proposing to fund a 1,000-kilometre oil pipeline across the country to Chad. Korinna Horta, from the Environmental Defense Fund, says this will damage the very rainforests the GEF project is now trying to save. The GEF, she says, is just a 'Band Aid for a battered planet'.

Rob Edwards & **Sanjay Kumar**/*New Scientist* No 2137.

Murdoch's tax holiday

Tax investigators from Britain, the US, Canada and Australia have launched a secret joint inquiry to examine why Rupert Murdoch's global media empire pays hardly any tax. Last year, while other international media groups, such as Walt Disney, paid up to 28 per cent of their income in tax, Murdoch's News Corporation reported paying only 7.9 per cent – only $103 million from an operating profit of $1.3 billion. In 1989 an Australian investigation found that News Corporation had routed its profits through subsidiaries in low-tax countries such as the Cayman Islands.

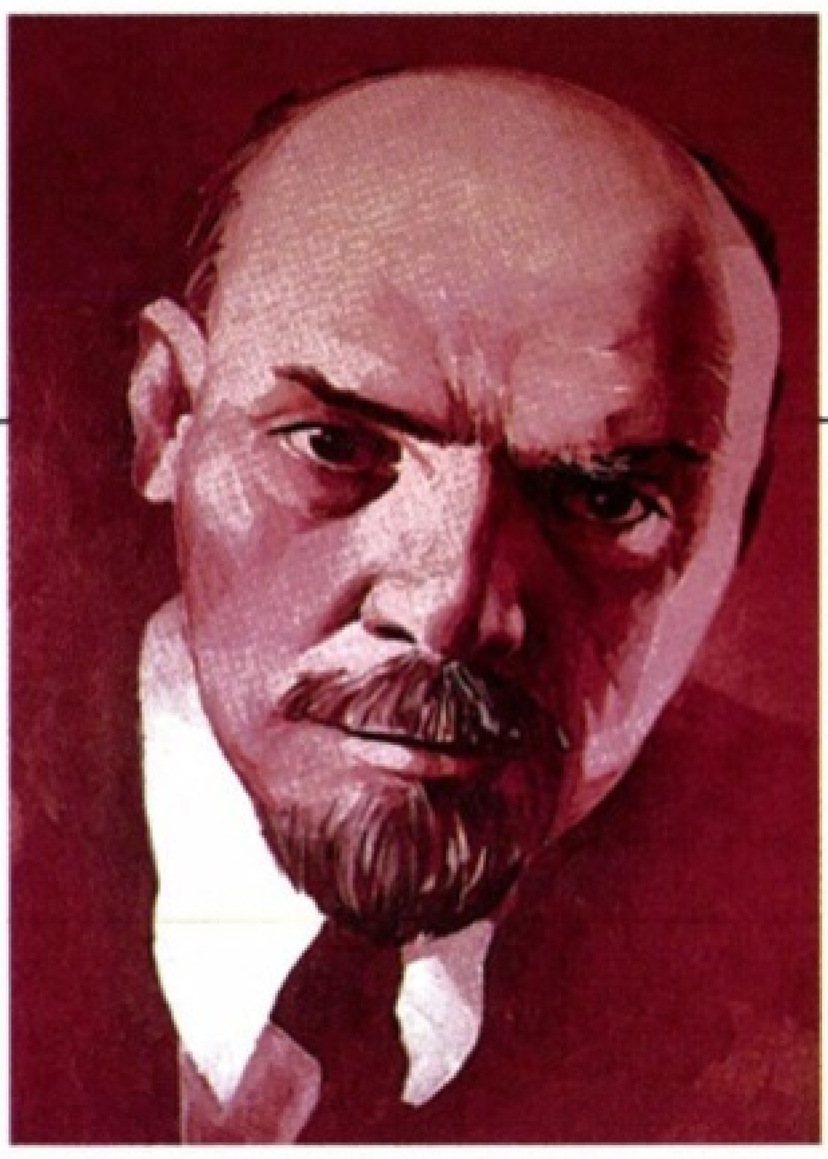
World Press Review Vol 45 No 5

Smart solution

British criminals who kill badgers will find they are marked men. Badger baiting, in which a badger is pitted against fighting dogs, has been illegal since 1981 – but the 'sport' is still practised. By painting badgers with 'Smart Water', an invisible solution with a unique chemical fingerprint which marks those who touch it, police can now link suspects and their dogs to the crime. Shops and art galleries have used 'Smart Water' to prevent and detect theft.

New Scientist Vol 158 No 2130

JM WINANTS / STILL PICTURES



SEAN SPRAGUE / PANOS PICTURES

Most important – Lenin.

Heroes and history

A Russian poll indicates roughly equal numbers believe Stalin should be remembered for leading the country to victory in World War Two, feel he was a tyrant and think that it is too early to pass judgement. Lenin is ranked as the most important historical figure since 1917, followed by Stalin. Human-rights campaigner Andrei Sakharov came in third place.

Transitions Vol 5 No 4

Clams get cheap thrills

An American biologist from Pennsylvania says the antidepressant Prozac can make freshwater clams and mussels spawn. Some clam farmers are already using serotonin to make molluscs spawn in unison. Farmers can then raise a single crop that can be marketed at the same time. But at $22 a gram Peter Fong of Gettysburg College says it is 'much too expensive for aquafarmers in the developing world'. Fong says Prozac has the same effect and may be cheaper than serotonin.

New Scientist No 2128

Diamonds are gone forever

Authorities at Alexcor, one of South Africa's most lucrative diamond mines, have ordered all unregistered pigeons to be shot in an attempt to stop thieves using the birds to smuggle gems out of the complex. Mandla Msomi, chair of Parliament's public enterprises committee, said diamonds valued at about $200 million were stolen from the mine last year, most of them strapped to well-trained homing pigeons. Each year mines on the Atlantic coast in the northern Cape spend millions of dollars hiring security companies. But security agents have failed to handle the 'pigeon problem'.

Panafrican News Agency

Quote

'The White House is like a subway: You have to put in coins to open the gates.'

Johnnie Chung, who pleaded guilty to making illegal donations to US President Bill Clinton's election campaign.

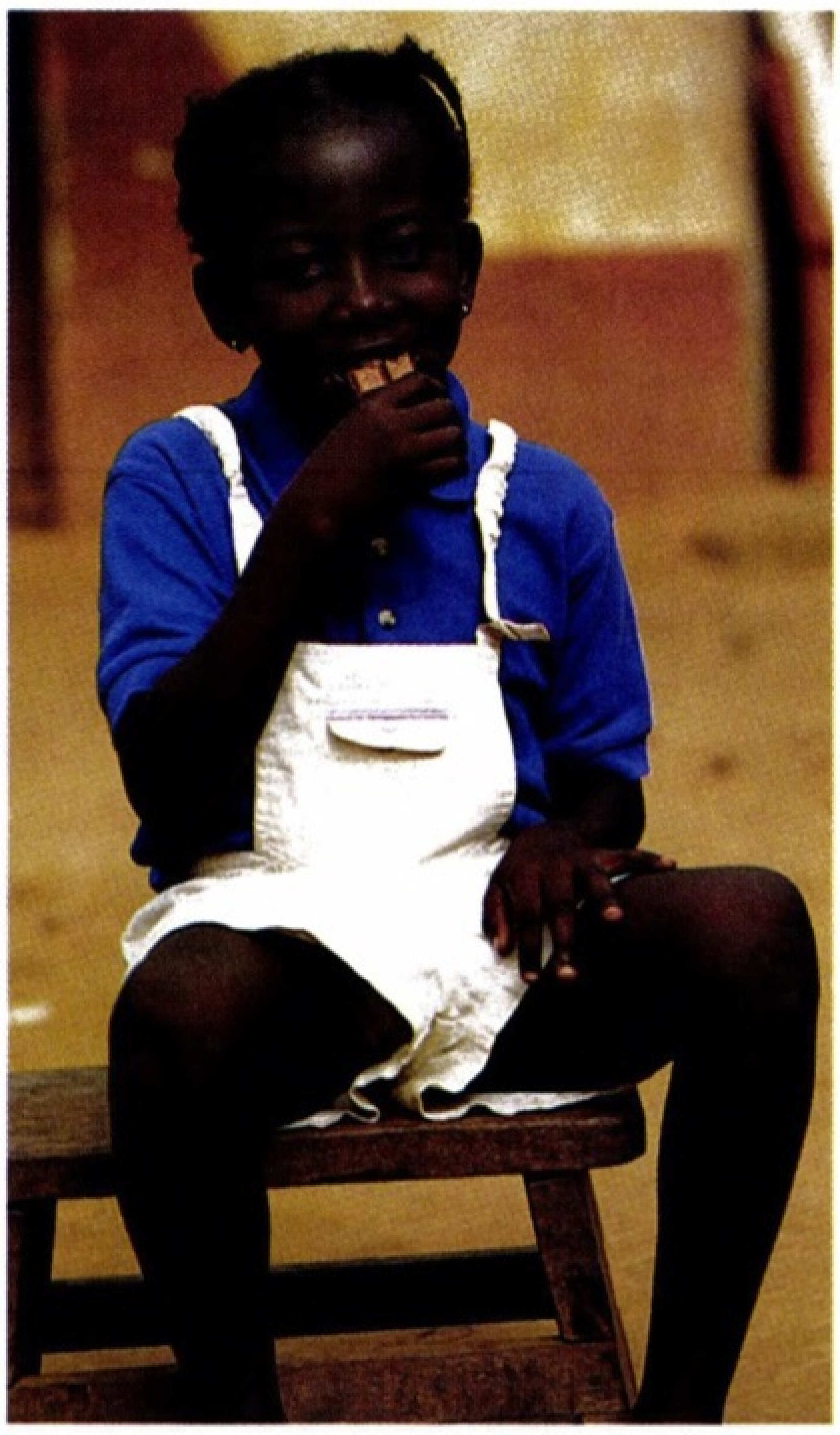
The cocoa chain

The cocoa chain starts under Asamoah's trees high in the hills of Western Ghana. **Richard Swift** accompanies Asamoah on the bittersweet journey from cocoa to chocolate.

PRISCILLA and Clifford have never tasted chocolate in their lives. Not that odd really. After all, how many children in the poor South know the same pleasures and toys that cram so much of childhood in the affluent North? The odd part of it is that Priscilla and Clifford live in a village in the Ashante region of Ghana, West Africa, which would probably not exist at all were it not for chocolate. Camp Number One, as their village is called, owes its rather barracks-like name to a lumber camp run here in the 1950s by a British firm, Christian Brothers. Today most of the villagers' income depends upon the sale of their cocoa crops. Without cocoa there would be no money for necessities that cannot be made or grown locally, or for school fees. If they are lucky, the villagers have enough left over to pay for emergencies, a family crisis, a doctor's bill or a funeral – a significant and expensive event in Ghana. Chocolate is just not on the menu.

I am staying with Priscilla and Clifford's grandfather, Koto Asamoah Serebour. The idea is to spend time in Ghana with Asamoah,

ALL PHOTOS: SARA ERRINGTON



Priscilla tastes chocolate for the first time, and finds it a very serious matter indeed.

a cocoa farmer, and then accompany him back to Britain along the trail the cocoa bean follows to become chocolate. The trip should reveal how the cocoa, so vital to farmers like Asamoah (and all Ghanaians), falls prey to everyone from big chocolate companies to high-stakes speculators. We'll find out too how cocoa has become a pawn in a structural-adjustment game designed in Washington but played out in Ghana's towns and villages.

Sara Errington, the photographer who was with me for part of my stay in Camp Number One, has brought some prize-winning, Ghanaian-produced Golden Tree chocolate. Why not see if the kids like it? The response is mixed and follows advertising folk wisdom about chocolate and gender stereotypes. Clifford, aged three-and-a-half, takes a few tentative nibbles before his look of scepticism is replaced with one bordering on disgust. Priscilla, who is seven, works on the bar of 'Kingsbite' milk chocolate slowly and methodically, but with definite enthusiasm. She won't crack a smile for the camera – for her, this chocolate business is a serious matter. Perhaps she realizes that when the two *Kwesi Bromi* ('White people' in the Twi language) leave the supply of chocolate is likely to go with them.

Asamoah proves a careful guide for me through the world of cocoa farming, and much else Ghanaian and Ashante as well. I can still feel his hand prodding me in the back as we drive along, to make sure I understand that the area we are passing, although once cocoa-rich, has been destroyed by brush fires. Or, a little later on and another poke: 'Some farmers here, in desperation over low prices, sold the wood from their land and now the whole area is becoming savannah.' Or, again with a gap-toothed grin: 'This is where we stop to eat *fu fu*' (a casssava-based Ghanaian delicacy).

Asamoah is quite a small man in his mid-fifties with the most wonderful long fingers. He is serious but with a warmth and a good sense of humour about the absurdity that inevitably colours life. He weighs issues of principle carefully and takes moral judgement seriously. He is well-informed and listens to the BBC World Service several times a day. When he reads he puts on a pair of spectacles, the arms of which are skewed at an amazing angle, and he looks very studious. One can well imagine him as the schoolteacher he was for 31 years. Asamoah is surprisingly formal and likes the familiarity of religious ritual, be it in the local Catholic Church, where he is a devout member, or in the secular rituals that shape life in Camp Number One. He uses an English that sounds very old-fashioned to my ears but is at the same time wonderfully descriptive. A machete is a cutlass. A slingshot for driving birds out of the cocoa trees is a catapult. A fun-loving person is 'very jovial'. When we walk 'we must follow this course'. And when Asamoah explains what it is like keeping 45-odd school kids in line he claims that 'you must be very stern or they will overtake you'.

His eagerness for our project helped keep me going at times when the whole enterprise seemed problematic. I can still see the look of delight on his face when we finally got word that the British High Commission in Accra had agreed to grant him a visitor's visa. He rubbed his hands together with glee and exclaimed: 'The poor cocoa farmer gets to go to London!' This is the first time he has ever really been outside of Ghana.

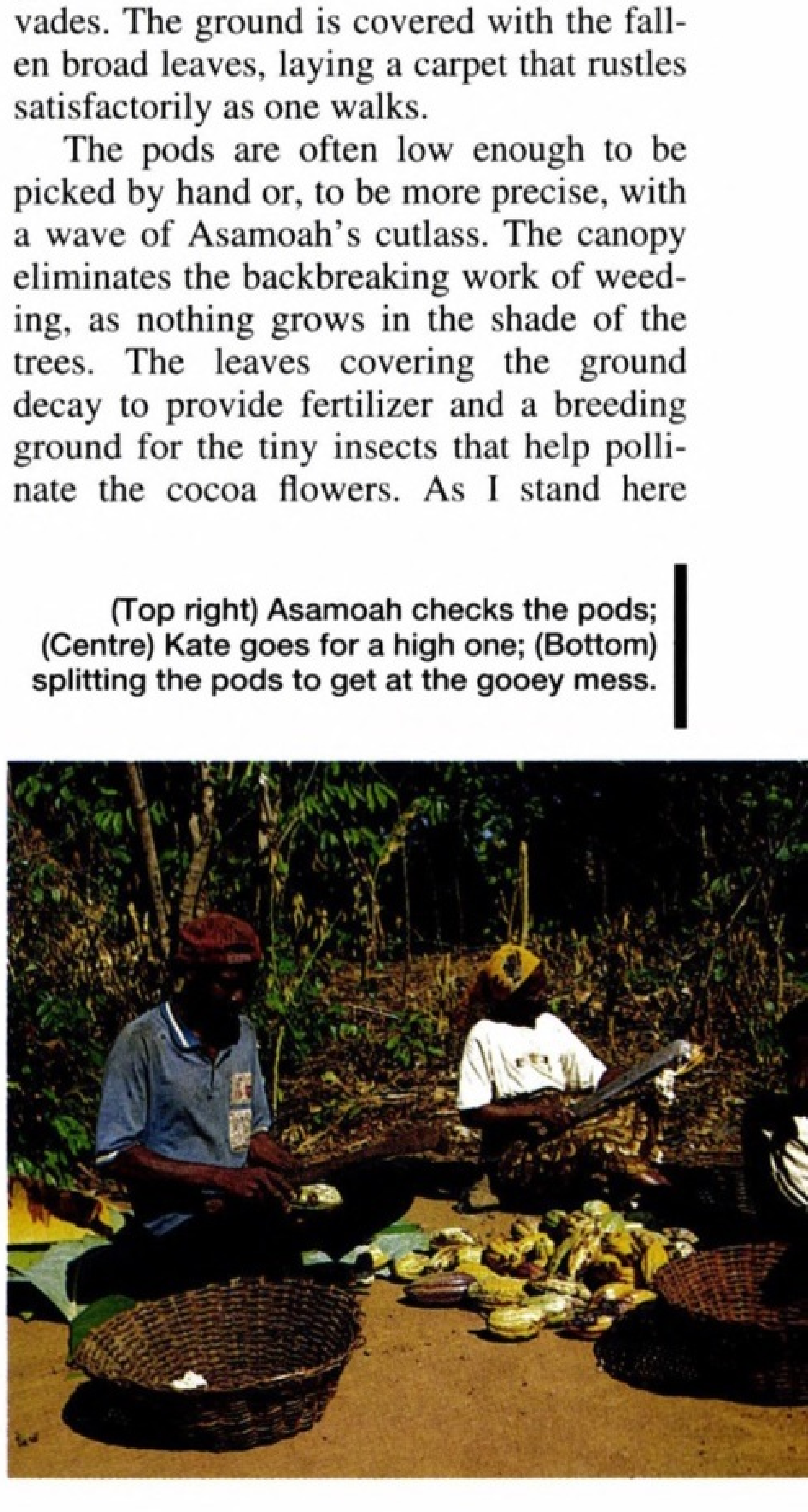
One thing that Asamoah takes very seriously is his cocoa farming. Last year he retired from his job teaching to devote himself to his eight-acre farm full-time. He is disdainful of the increasing number of Ghanaian farmers, just landowners really, who never work on their own farms but leave it up to caretakers – often Muslims from the poor north of the country. He and his wife Kate are very much partners in their farm. It is about two miles from Camp Number One, off a dirt track that is impassable for vehicles in the rainy season and runs from the main road that leads to the local market centre of Sankari.

We leave the dirt track and head off on a path that winds its way through the cocoa trees, moving gently up a hill. Kate moves on ahead to start gathering some of the food crops that the farm also yields. Asamoah pauses to show us how the pods are developing. He makes cooing and clucking noises as he inspects the greenish-to-yellowish pods – depending on their ripeness – that sprout from the tree trunks. These pods are generally the size of large melons. He points out examples of the detested Black Pod disease that destroys up to 40 per cent of the Ghanaian crop every year. Asamoah uses a fungicide to protect his crop, but is much more circumspect when it comes to more expensive pesticides and fertilizers. Every once in a while he pauses to indicate where 'Old Mary's' land ends and 'Young Mary's' land begins. We can see no obvious markers, but he assures us that not only are they there but that everyone in the village knows what belongs to whom, down to the smallest sapling.

A cocoa farm is nothing like I imagined tropical agriculture. My notions probably came from watching old movies of slaves working in the intense heat of cotton fields, or the backbreaking work of harvesting groundnuts. By contrast, a cocoa farm is a wonderfully cool and restful place. The trees, which at maturity spread a leafy canopy, grow to 4½ or 5 metres high. The canopy provides almost unbroken shade, occasional sun filtering in so the pods can grow. A delicious coolness and quiet pervades. The ground is covered with the fallen broad leaves, laying a carpet that rustles satisfactorily as one walks.

The pods are often low enough to be picked by hand or, to be more precise, with a wave of Asamoah's cutlass. The canopy eliminates the backbreaking work of weeding, as nothing grows in the shade of the trees. The leaves covering the ground decay to provide fertilizer and a breeding ground for the tiny insects that help pollinate the cocoa flowers. As I stand here

(Top right) Asamoah checks the pods; (Centre) Kate goes for a high one; (Bottom) splitting the pods to get at the gooey mess.



gazing up out of the forest to the far hills, home to many other cocoa farms, it seems an almost perfect ecosystem as well as a cool refuge from the midday heat.

But cocoa farms are not places for the idle contemplation of nature. Asamoah and Kate, with the help of their young caretaker, Mamudu, prepare to show us the whole process of harvesting. First we go to pick some of the riper pods. There are two harvest seasons for most West African cocoa. The pods we are currently picking belong to the early part of the second crop – the first and most significant one is picked in the November/December period. Some of the higher pods must be cut with the use of a long cutting tool wielded very adroitly by Mamudu. When the ripe pods are finally gathered in a large wicker basket they are heaped in front of the caretaker's hut.

Then Kate, Asamoah and Mamudu begin the slow and careful work of splitting open the pods and scraping out the slimy white mucous-like collection of damp beans. These are heaped onto plantain leaves and then painstakingly wrapped, to be left out in the heat of the West African sun for fermentation to take place.

Fermentation requires anything from five to seven days. The beans then begin to look like something that might yield up cocoa. They are taken out of the leaves to a spindly-looking drying structure made of sticks, then spread across the bamboo-slated top and left to dry in the sun. This process takes from five to ten days and is periodically interrupted by the farmer, who meticulously turns the beans over by hand or with a short-handled rake. The purpose of this is twofold: to make sure each bean gets its due quota of sun, and to pick out beans that are no good, usually black rather than rich-brown, or too scrawny, thereby lowering the price per bag.

It is the care that West African – particularly Ghanaian – farmers take with fermentation and drying that has given their cocoa its reputation as the world's best, much superior to the cocoa grown on huge plantations in places like Brazil, Indonesia and Malaysia. There the individual care and variety in the type of beans are sacrificed on the altar of monocultural uniformity. There is little chance that a low-paid and harassed plantation worker will take the kind of pride Asamoah obviously does in the quality of his produce. It is for this reason that Ghanaian cocoa fetches a premium price and is so valued among makers of quality chocolate. However, many of the major chocolate manufacturers are willing to reduce the cocoa content in their product and replace cocoa butter with a cheaper fat substitute. So it is an open question whether quality is the winning card in global cocoa production.

But Kate and Asamoah get more than cocoa off their land. With the beans safely wrapped in their plantain coverings, we move off to see what we can find for our food that night. Kate points to an unimpressive-looking plant on the ground and sets to digging. She soon comes up with a handsome collection of yams and she harvests the leaves of the plant as well. They make an excellent vegetable, particularly delicious when cooked up by Kate's daughter, Florence, using palm oil in the preparation. Then Mamudu points to a bunch of plantains dangling in the centre of a tree. These are quickly dispatched with the help of the long cutting tool and added to the growing cornucopia in Kate's basket. The farm also yields up cassava and deliciously sweet small bananas. Asamoah estimates that, with the addition of the chickens kept on the farm and the goats from the compound down in Camp, his family provides 65 per cent of its own food. He says this is common for the rest of the villagers as well. He reels off the short list of what people still have to buy – cooking oil, sugar, salt, bread, dried fish and sometimes meat.

One of the keys to the success of small farmers growing cocoa is the use of intercropping with food crops. Ghana's Cocoa Research Institute in Tafo has advised farmers on the best ways to do this for decades. It has been, in this area at least, an exemplary use of indigenous science to aid development.

The main competition to West African cocoa these days comes from the giant plantations of Latin America, mostly Brazil and then from Southeast Asia. The average cocoa farm in Ghana, however, is still just two acres. There is a growing recognition that small farmers like Asamoah not only provide better quality but are more efficient producers as well. One of their advantages lies in the use of the land to provide for the rest of a family's nutritional needs. They are less dependent on the cash economy for basic survival.

There is little chance that a low-paid and harrassed plantation worker will take the kind of pride Asamoah obviously does in the quality of his produce

Mamudu and his wife and two daughters live on the farm full-time, watching over the cocoa from dawn to dusk. I am puzzled as to the exact relationships involved in the caretaker system. Asamoah explains to me that Mamudu gets a third of the income from the crop and that this is the general rule of thumb throughout the cocoa-growing regions. Sometimes a farmer shares the crop 50/50, but only when the caretaker has helped prepare the farm, planting the shoots which become cocoa trees and building the necessary accommodation. Are caretakers exploited, I wonder? In some ways they share the disadvantageous position of anyone without land or capital and with only their labour to sell. But they are certainly better off than someone working for slave wages on a large plantation – for they get to share both the fruits of their labour and the food crops from the farm.

Letting fly at pesky birds and squirrels: caretakers like Mamudu are vital in caring for Ghana's cocoa crop.

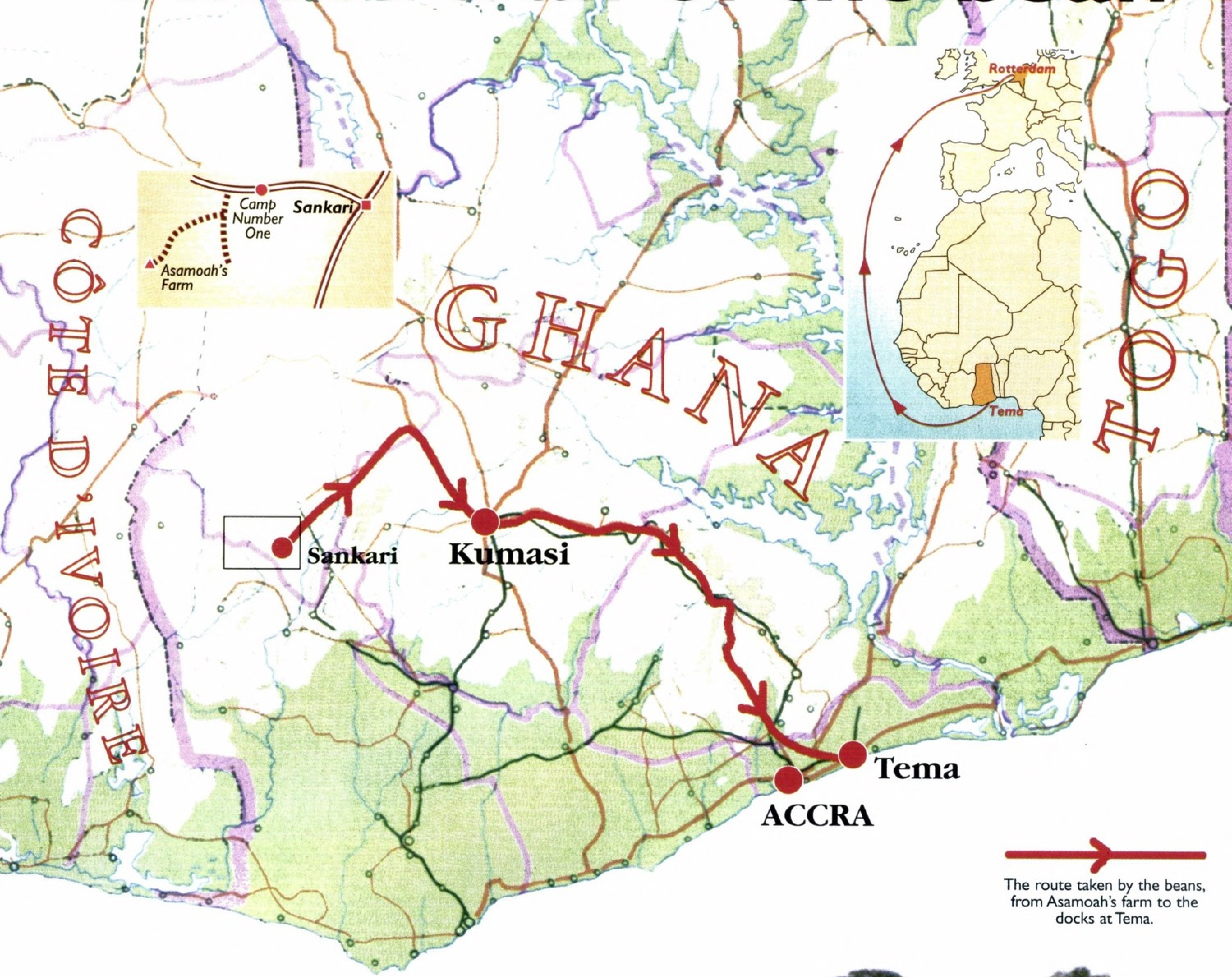
But there are definite problems. For example, neither of Mamudu's two young daughters, Martha and Samata, makes the 3km trek every morning to the school at Camp. Their mother, Zinabu, says it is just too far and they are too little. But one suspects the cost of schooling is also a factor. On the other hand, living up on the farm seems to me quite desirable when compared to the more crowded and dusty village on the road below. It is peaceful and cool and some farmers – such as Asamoah's neighbour, the next farm over – have chosen to live up here. When we visit the neighbour and sit in the shade of his cocoa trees, sipping the milk out of freshly cut coconuts, the choice seems eminently sensible.

It is time to pack up and head back to the village below. I remark to Asamoah about his handsome pair of bright-yellow rubber boots – obviously part of his regular farmers gear. He explains: 'I always wear these when I come up to the farm because of the black cobras and the scorpions and poisonous spiders that are so plentiful in the bush.' I look down at my own flimsy sandals and the trip back down to the road takes on a whole new drama.

Cocoa farming is serious business in Ghana. While there are some 500,000 to 600,000 farmers, there are also at least a million caretakers. In a country of roughly 19 million inhabitants this makes cocoa by far the biggest contributor to people's livelihoods. Cocoa is both social security for old age and the only inheritance many families will ever see. However, a large proportion of Ghana's cocoa farmers are in their sixties or seventies. It is hard to get young people to take up farming and stay in the village. A situation is evolving where it is the caretakers who do the actual farming while the owners are absentee city-dwellers.

I chat to Asamoah about the future of the farm of which he is so justly proud. Now in his mid-fifties, he has many good years left. But of his eight children only two still live in Camp – the rest have all moved to the Ashante capital, Kumasi. He holds out hope that his son, Joseph, who runs a carpentry business in the village, will take up the farm at some point. But this does not seem to me a sure thing. Joseph is very involved with his carpentry shop just outside the Serebour's family compound. So Asamoah's prospects mirror those of many older Ghanaian cocoa farmers. But he is an optimist by nature and proud of his Ashante roots: 'Once we were warriors and triumphed over our enemies. Now we are farmers and fight the bush.' He grins as Camp Number One comes into view. ■

On the trail of the bean


Camp Number One
Sankari
Asamoah's Farm
CÔTE D'IVOIRE
GHANA
TOGO
Rotterdam
Tema
Sankari
Kumasi
Tema
ACCRA

The route taken by the beans, from Asamoah's farm to the docks at Tema.

Sankari

PHOTO BY RICHARD SWIFT

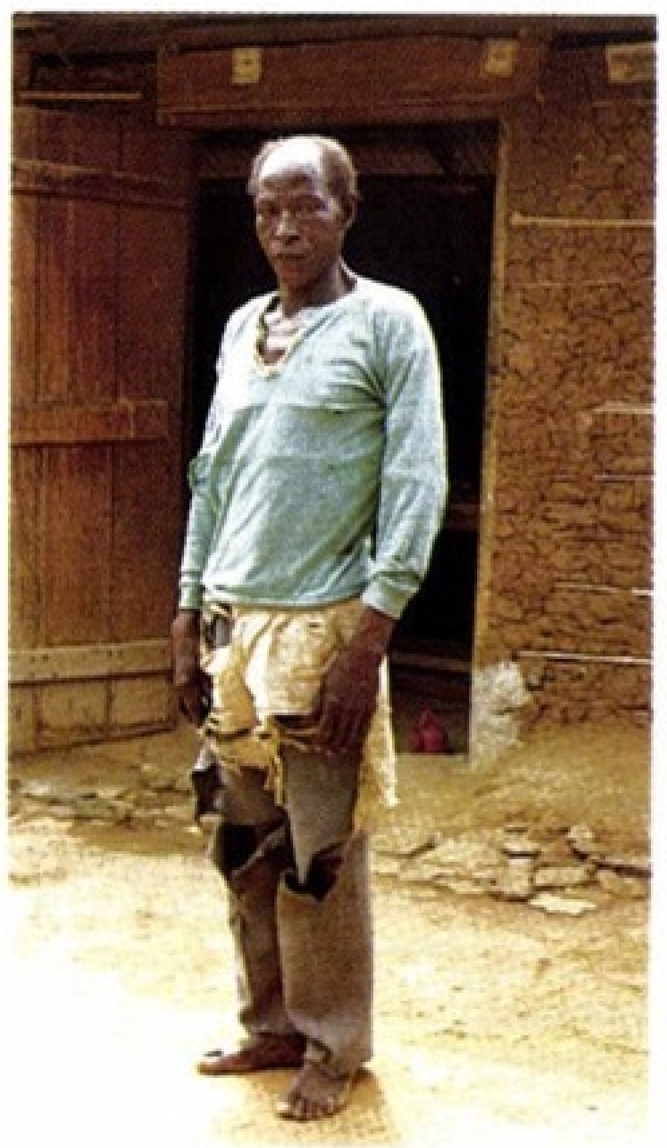
Deep roots in

Life may be tough and real hardship never far distant, but for the villagers of Camp Number One it is filled with subtle layers of complexity, commitment and the occasional catastrophe for the Black Stars of Ghana.

My favourite time in Camp Number One is the early morning and then, later, the early evening. It is then that the blinding directness of the tropical sun gives way to a more diffuse light that slants in over the bush-covered hills and through the trees.

Life starts early in Asamoah and Kate's family compound. The first sounds are of a rhythmic sweeping as their daughter Florence begins the day-long battle to keep the hard-dirt compound tidy – particularly difficult at this time of year when the *harmatten* winds from the Sahara blow dust almost everywhere. When I first arrive in Camp I mistake this dust for mist, or smoke from cooking fires and slash-and-burn land clearances. But it is mostly the dust that diffuses the light.

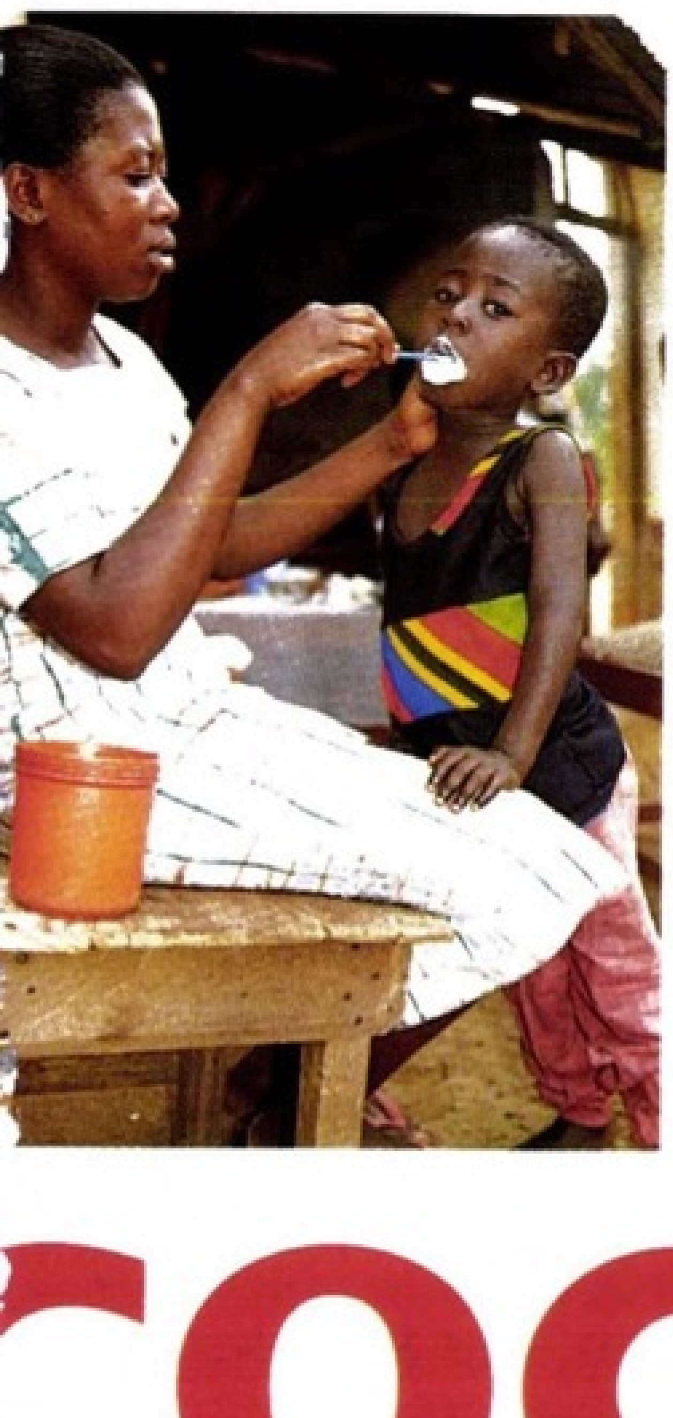
I ask Asamoah which season is his favourite and he says the main rainy season, which runs from April to June. For him, the coming of the rains is a sign that there will be a good cocoa crop. But each season has



its function. *Harmatten* time, when the dry earth releases unwanted vegetation with minimal resistance, is the easiest for clearing land to plant new saplings.

In the evenings, as it darkens, oil lanterns become the only source of light. Without competition from electricity, the sky puts on a spectacular display of stars. As the lanterns flicker, the children's shadows appear huge against the walls of the house, like some slow-motion show of giant puppets, as their frenetic day slows to bedtime rhythms. Once the children are off to bed, Florence wanders in and out of their room, softly singing lullabies as she goes about her evening tasks.

Very few of the adults among the 500-odd residents of Camp Number One – 'If you say it fast it sounds Ghanaian' – were actually born here. When the area was logged out in the 1960s, cocoa farmers began to move in and plant their trees. The village is strung out along a road not far from Sankari, the regional centre. Most of the residents are Ashante people, the largest tribe in the country and the descendants of one of pre-colonial Africa's great civilizations. As the crow flies it is actually not that far from Kumasi, Ghana's second-largest city and the traditional Ashante capital. But no-one flies like crows. If you take the road it is a good four hours and pretty bumpy. There are not many amenities in Camp: a few stores that sell almost everything; two night 'spots' where one can drink in the late hours – most bars in Ghana are called 'spots', as in 'Mango Tree Spot' or 'Friends After Work Spot' – and a lot of places of worship. The houses are organized in compounds that are, by one means or another, fenced off on four sides. The basic construction is of mud and sticks, while the more prosperous folk are able to cement the whole thing over. People live together in extended-family groups that may include children and grandchildren, nieces and nephews, uncles and aunts, brothers and sisters – as many as 15 or 16 members. Asamoah's household contains himself and Kate, his son Joseph, daughter Florence and her two children, Priscilla and Clifford. Most of life in Ghana is organized in such units, so everyone belongs at least somewhere.



(Top left) Kate irons the funeral clothes; top right: Moussa ran into trouble when forced to borrow from a money-lender; (Left) Clifford gets his teeth brushed.

People in Camp Number One may be poor and have little by way of cash incomes, except what the sale of bags of cocoa beans provides, but there is no starvation and little malnutrition. These people are not the classic African victims seen all too often on TV screens. They are, however, dangerously vulnerable to the winds of fate – whether they come from the climate, individual misfortune or the machinations of the outside world. A sudden illness, too many funerals, a divorce, a political coup or a dip in the world price of cocoa means real hardship – barely enough food to go around, no money for fees to keep kids in school, a future mortgaged by the forced sale of land. The extended-family economy means that many hands must contribute to the household and many demands are made on a fragile budget.

Asamoah introduces me to one of his neighbours, Moussa, a Muslim and a native of Burkina Faso. After his divorce his cocoa crop fell into the hands of moneylenders: for the next 45 years it will no longer be his. He took to milling corn, but now the mill is broken and he cannot afford to fix it. He clings to existence on a combination of charity and casual labour.

What Moussa is going through today, whole villages in cocoa country experience whenever prices dip too drastically. In the early 1980s what the big chocolate companies were paying dropped by nearly two-thirds in just four years. With farmers often getting less than 40 per cent of this price from the official Ghanaian Cocobod, the effects were disastrous. The whole thing was exacerbated by the drought conditions effecting all of Sahelian Africa, and by political instability in Ghana associated with the military seizure of power by Jerry Rawlings. It was during this period that the 'Rawlings chain' jokes began. With delicious humour Ghanaians would compare their exposed collarbones, their 'Rawlings chains': 'Oh, yours is bigger than mine.' Many farmers simply walked away from their cocoa, cutting down trees or letting the pods rot on the trunks. Young people left the villages and did not return – even when prices rebounded – once they had developed a taste for city life.

Then, as now, humour and faith saw most people through. Life in Camp revolves around the six churches and two mosques. There are a couple of mainline Christian churches (Catholic and Presbyterian) but the bulk are fundamentalist evangelical, like the Pentecostals. A church I have not heard of before is the Mousano Disco Christian Church – a Ghanaian original – which, Asamoah informs me, 'praises God with the beating of drums'. This is done until late into the night.

White folks aren't all that usual in these parts. When Sara and I first arrive at Asamoah's compound dozens of children flock to check us out – the bold coming right in the gate, the timid staring through the cracks in the fence. During our entire stay, whenever we venture out of the compound we are accompanied by convoys of children competing to get hold of our hands.

The first night is devoted to a series of visits from different Camp notables: teachers, various local representatives of Kuapa Koko, the producers' union. Asamoah conducts these meetings in an extremely formal fashion, perhaps reminiscent of the days when it might be a matter of life or death to gauge a visitor's intentions accurately. He carefully explains to us: 'First we must ask them of their mission.' When this is accomplished we extend our greetings and thank them for their attentions. When we go to visit someone else the process is reversed. Once we are back in Britain I fear that Asamoah may have found the way I conduct myself at meetings a bit on the casual side.

Sara and I become officially part of things when the town-crier wanders through the village the next evening to announce our arrival, as well as that of a Pentecostal evangelist. The drums start early, working up the crowd for the evangelist. I, however, choose the other option: the Black Stars of Ghana have a football match against Togo, televized from Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso. It's the

PHOTOS BY SARA ERRINGTON EXCEPT WHERE MARKED

cocoa country

Our mothers taught us how: the women of Camp Number One produce excellent soap from discarded cocoa husks.

Africa Cup and every football fan in town is crammed into the chief's compound to watch on an old black-and-white TV powered by a battery. We bring our own chairs and sit in orderly rows. Every once in a while one of the chief's goats wanders in front of the screen and has to be shooed off. Things are not going well in Ouagadougou. The Black Stars, who were expected to be one of the real powers at this year's cup, have fallen behind. Ghanaians have a wonderful exclamation indicating unpleasant surprise, discontent or disapproval – a loudly-uttered 'Ohieee!' As things deteriorate, the number of disapproving 'Ohieees!' that punctuate the darkness increases exponentially.

Aside from his Catholicism, Asamoah's other commitment is to Kuapa Kokoo, the cocoa-farmers' union based in Kumasi. Since its inception in 1993 Kuapa has put down deep roots in Ghana's cocoa country. With the money provided through cocoa sales to fair-trade organizations in Europe it has now been able to engage a gender-and-development officer. She is planning her first visit to Camp next week, and a meeting of women cocoa farmers is being convened where Asamoah will read a letter – few others in Camp read or speak much English – laying out the issues to be dealt with when she comes.

About a dozen women gather in the shade of one of the compound walls for the discussion. The main topic is a revolving fund to be set up with Kuapa money to support a mini-enterprise making soap out of cocoa husks. Everyone participates in the meeting, which gets hung up on whether the wives of caretakers should be eligible, although they have no land to put up as security.

As the meeting draws to a close it is our turn to say a few words. We start with the Kuapa chant. The leader of the chant yells out '*Kuapa!*' ('good farming' or 'farmer'). Everyone else then chimes in with '*Pa pa paa*' ('the best of the best'), dragging out the 'a' sound at the end. In my speech I push an import-substitution line long out of favour in orthodox development circles. I congratulate the women on producing soap from the cocoa harvest, not allowing all the benefits to be exported abroad. Sara gets a significantly better response for her speech on God granting a good harvest.

Altogether I spend about a week in Camp Number One living with Kate, Asamoah and their family. I eat what they eat. Everyone we meet is fascinated: 'Have you tried our *fu fu* yet?' they ask. I use the bucket-shower to keep cool. And so I get to peel back just a few of the layers that make an African village such a wonderfully complicated place. Religion of several kinds, international and resource economics, custom and modern culture, agronomy and climate, inter-personal politics and national party allegiance – all these sometimes cohabit, sometimes collide. An event as seemingly straightforward as a funeral, with its very public grief, can contain levels of meaning for the community that are unimaginable back at the desks of aid bureaucrats.

The day comes when Asamoah and I must leave on the journey that will eventually take us to England. It falls to Kate to give Sara and me a formal goodbye. And it is heartwarming. She thanks us for coming to stay in the bush: 'It is hard for me to believe that white people would do such a thing. Many Ghanaians, even our own relatives, refuse to come and visit the village because they consider life here just too primitive. Once people live in Kumasi or Accra they are no longer willing to come. So it is very special for us, the Serebour family, that you have made this effort.'

It was one of those moments where one is deeply touched by what is, to be honest, quite undeserved gratitude. ■

The cost of cocoa

Sharing out the economic benefits of the trade

Cocoa is like a lot of other Southern export crops. In the lingo of the economists it lacks structural links, or 'spin-offs', to the domestic economy. Aside from the obvious income accruing to individual farmers, or going into public expenditure, very little by way of job creation or industrial activity results from growing cocoa. Increasingly, producer countries are doing some of the processing (or grinding) before the cocoa is exported, which at least provides some extra employment.

In Ghana there is a small chocolate industry producing an excellent range of high-cocoa Golden Tree chocolates in the port cities of Tema and Takoradi. But these are successfully kept out of the North by high tariff walls – 34 per cent in Europe – and poor economies of scale. Most of this chocolate is consumed in the very small domestic market. It is a luxury item, out of the reach of most Ghanaians. There are ambitions to build a regional market for Golden Tree, but even if these are successful markets will remain limited by low incomes and cheaper competition from Big Chocolate.

So it is not unreasonable for governments to tax exported cocoa as a way of spreading some of the cocoa wealth to meet the needs of the rest of society. In West Africa, the big producing countries – Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire – have done this to a point where the small cocoa farmer bears too much of the burden of state expenditure. This endangers the sustainability of the cocoa economy and now the pendulum is swinging back, to give farmers a better deal on their crop. The 'spread-effect' is more significant where cocoa remains a small-holder crop than it is on the agrochemical plantations of Indonesia, where workers make about one dollar a day.

While it is important for farmers to get a decent price it is also important for the governments of the South not to have their fiscal hands tied when trying to meet such basic needs as heath, education, farmer-support and infrastructure maintenance. Unfortunately, their hands are being tied by structural adjustment. In Ghana this is compounded by the problem of ageing and often absentee cocoa farmers. With children unable or unwilling to take them over farms may become commodities to be sold into ever-larger parcels of land. While full-scale plantations are unlikely, ownership concentration could result in a small class of absentee farmers with relatively large holdings and a large group of 'caretakers' who actually work the farms. This will both skew income distribution in the cocoa economy and increase the potential for conflict between owners and caretakers. Recently a farmer's representative claimed on Ghanaian television that 'most cocoa farmers live in Accra' – certainly an overstatement at the moment, but perhaps a portent of the future.

Another potential spin-off is the truly spectacular number of by-products that can be derived from cocoa. These include fertilizer, animal feed and soap – made from the shells of the pod – as well as a range of cakes, biscuits and jams from cocoa powder. These last are being experimented with at the cocoa research station in Tafo, which is also producing a gin and a brandy made from the 'sweatings' of the cocoa beans during the fermentation process. While none of these things is likely to add up to much in terms of the Gross Domestic Product, they are an invaluable part of the survival economy in which cocoa farming is rooted – the complete utilization of the crop helps sustain a way of life and the social-security system of rural Ghana.

The race to stand **still**

Cocoa prices may go up, but the quality of life goes down. That's what structural adjustment means for cocoa farmers, as for all Ghanaians: cuts in services that put fragile incomes at risk.

HEAT and light begin to settle over Accra before six in the morning. The dog days of February are even hotter than usual. It is the kind of heat where one avoids superfluous steps... where the cotton of your shirt already sticks to your skin by eight in the morning. The TV weather map indicates heat not with the tiny suns that adorn most versions in the North – seldom free of intruding small clouds in Britain – but with flickering little flames.

I have arranged with Sam Nyako of the Cocobod to travel upcountry to the Cocoa Research Institute in Tafo. Sam proves to be an insightful guide – not at all what one would expect from someone in public relations. He combines a twinkle in the eye with a ready smile and a willingness to be candid, even if the truth is inconvenient. His commitment to both his country and the fate of its cocoa farmers is clear. I know from his nephew – through whom I made contact with him – that he was once offered a job at the United Nations Development Programme at many times his Cocobod salary. He chose to stay in Ghana.

Accra is just waking up as we pull out of town and start the climb up the small range of hills that runs all the way east to the Togolese border. The combination of the cooler height and the breeze blowing in through the window of the four-wheel-drive provides welcome relief. As we climb we are treated to a spectacular view of the Accra plain spread out below, the shimmering Atlantic beyond. There are lines of schoolchildren in brown tunics and pants and neat yellow shirts along the road all the way to the next hilltop. They meander past Ghana's 'informal sector' which is setting itself up on the roadside to sell anything it has that anyone might conceivably want, and afford, to buy: huge yams, *fou fou*, soups (the Ghanaian name for stews, or indeed almost any food), toilet paper, batteries, pens, lottery tickets – you name it.

Highways all over Ghana – and most of Africa for that matter – are a giant sales opportunity. On the main route from Accra northwest to Kumasi villages specialize in particular products, one selling furniture, another pottery and one that bills itself as the 'bread capital of the world'. It teems with saleswomen who run beside the traffic sticking various baked goods through car windows. In between villages one comes across young boys dangling plump, and quite dead, rodents known as 'grasscutters'. I am assured that they are absolutely delicious.

As we drive north Sam fills me in on the history of the Ghanaian Cocobod. It has its roots in the colonial buying monopoly set up by the British at the time of the Second World War. This was in response to African complaints that they were getting ripped off by the expatriate firms whose agents monopolized the purchase of the crop. The early history of cocoa production here is marked by a series of struggles in which farmers got together to hold back the sale of their crops and force up the price.

While the declared purpose of the board was to shield farmers from speculators and price fluctuations, it never did so. For the British, and later for the independent Ghanaian Governments, cocoa proved too tempting a source of public finance. Proceeds from cocoa had to underwrite the ambitious plans of Kwame Nkrumah, Ghana's first President, for education, health and industrial projects. So heavy

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(Right) Sam Nyako tastes the good stuff; (Below) a Cocobod truck ready to roll.

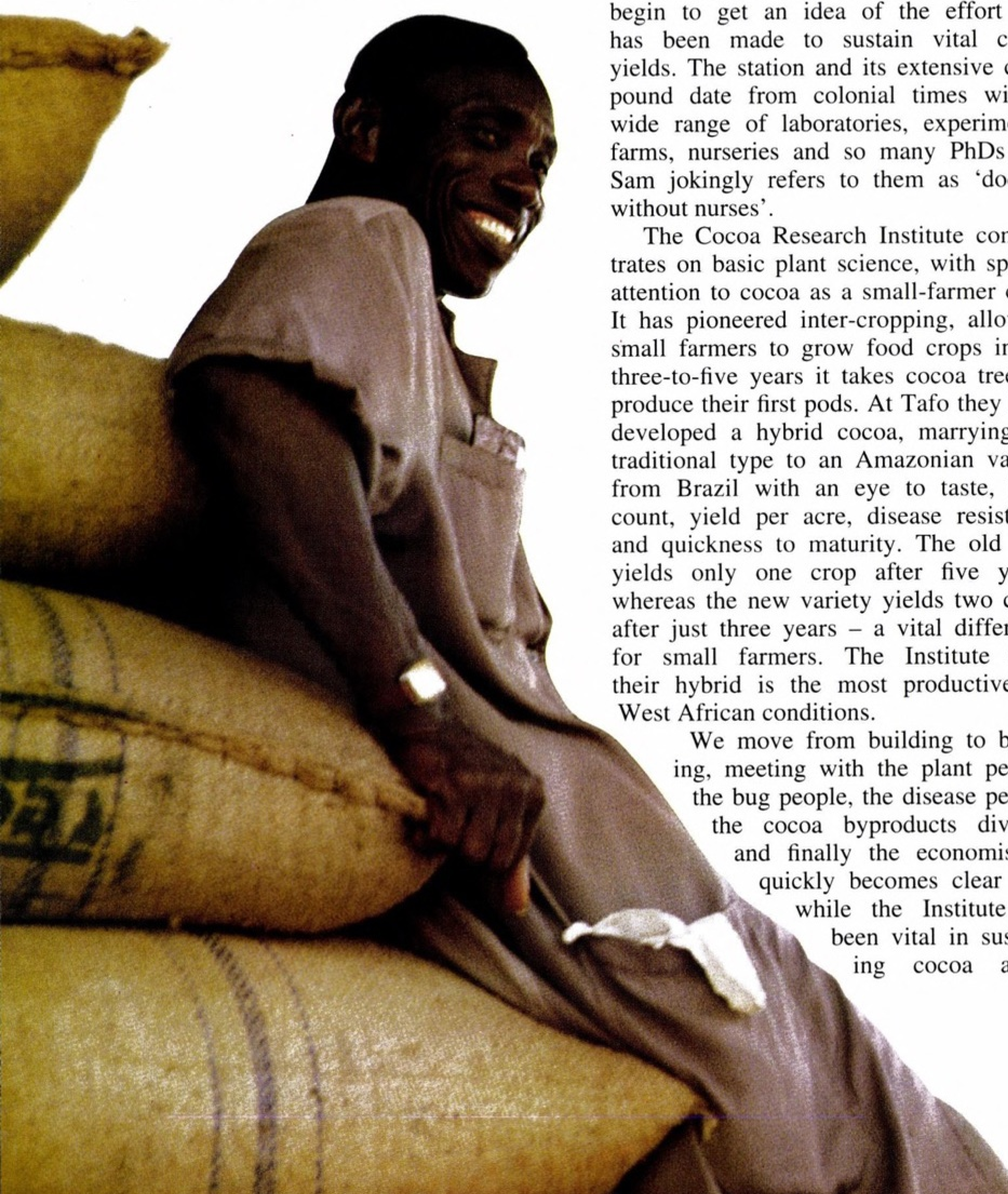
RICHARD SWIFT
SARA ERRINGTON

export taxes and other tariffs kept producer prices low. 'We compensated for this at the Cocobod, at least partially, by a series of free services to farmers, including subsidized fertilizers, pesticides and herbicides, free agricultural extension services, research and development of the best cocoa hybrids for Ghanaian conditions, free saplings, even labour to help at busy times on the farm,' Sam says. The argument was that, despite low prices, farmers were getting back some value in services.

This did not prove sufficient to sustain the cocoa economy. When the bottom dropped out of the cocoa market in the late 1970s, prices tumbled from almost $4,800 a ton to less than a third of that. With farmers getting less than 40 per cent of the world price from the Cocobod, this was a significant blow. Many farmers stopped producing cocoa altogether or switched to food crops, like maize or cassava, that fetched more reliable prices.

The situation worsened with the Sahelian drought that hit West Africa in the early 1980s. By 1983 conditions were so dry that a series of disastrous bush fires swept across Ghana's cocoa-growing country. Production plummeted. In 1972 Ghana produced nearly a third of the world's cocoa. A decade later this had fallen to just 12 per cent. With Ghana, like most of sub-Saharan Africa, staggering under a huge debt burden, the collapse of cocoa left the country teetering on the edge of bankruptcy.

RICHARD SWIFT



RICHARD SWIFT

(Above right) Dr Beatrice Padi holds forth on the mealy bug; (Below) Propped up by cocoa – the economic well-being of Ghanaians packed up and ready to go.

It was at this point that the World Bank and International Monetary Fund stepped in with a structural-adjustment package to 'rescue' the country's economy. If you read all the official literature you will conclude that the result is a tremendous success. For cocoa this has meant a downsized Cocobod and significantly higher prices for farmers. Sounds like good stuff.

As we finally pull through the gates of the Cocoa Research Institute in Tafo I begin to get an idea of the effort that has been made to sustain vital cocoa yields. The station and its extensive compound date from colonial times with a wide range of laboratories, experimental farms, nurseries and so many PhDs that Sam jokingly refers to them as 'doctors without nurses'.

The Cocoa Research Institute concentrates on basic plant science, with special attention to cocoa as a small-farmer crop. It has pioneered inter-cropping, allowing small farmers to grow food crops in the three-to-five years it takes cocoa trees to produce their first pods. At Tafo they have developed a hybrid cocoa, marrying the traditional type to an Amazonian variety from Brazil with an eye to taste, bean count, yield per acre, disease resistance and quickness to maturity. The old type yields only one crop after five years, whereas the new variety yields two crops after just three years – a vital difference for small farmers. The Institute feels their hybrid is the most productive for West African conditions.

We move from building to building, meeting with the plant people, the bug people, the disease people, the cocoa byproducts division and finally the economist. It quickly becomes clear that, while the Institute has been vital in sustaining cocoa as a small-farmer crop, there is a constant tension between its expensive, scientific, agrochemical approach and what the farmers can afford to do in the field.

We come across Dr Beatrice Padi, the head entomologist, struggling with her computer. She is obviously busy and a bit reticent. She tries to find us someone else to talk about the problems of mirids and mealybugs. But when I start asking her questions she is overtaken by her own enthusiasm for her work. After a brief survey of the threats from the bug world, and what can be done to combat them, we get into the question of the costs and dangers of pesticides. She shakes her head and declares: 'Most cocoa farmers resist spraying their crop the three times recommended by the Institute. They may do it once, or not at all.'

We get a similar story from the plant-disease department, although the amounts of fungicides and their cost are significantly less than with pesticides. The farmers, when they can, use 'cultural practices' to control threats to their cocoa. For example, while official advice calls for the use of an expensive imported dye to kill alien trees, farmers have been getting rid of unwanted trees by stripping off the sapling's bark and applying palm wine for a long time.

It is not until we get to talk to the economist, Mr Asanti, that all these pieces start to fall into place. We then begin to see the debit side of the structural-adjustment ledger. While the Cocobod has estimated that agro-chemicals are economically viable, Asanti concedes that the farmers have a strong case when they claim they can't afford them. He pulls out a report which shows a two-year increase in cocoa prices of 107 per cent outstripped by an increase in the price of insecticides of 657 per cent, fungicides of 250 per cent and spraying machines of 400 per cent. He points to the IMF/World Bank removal of subsidies and insistence on a crippling devaluation of the *cedi* as factors that have pushed these chemicals out of the price range of most farmers.

It is about an hour's drive to the Cocobod's Agricultural College at Bunso. Here the mood is decidedly more downbeat. Structural-adjustment reforms have bitten deep into the agricultural extension service. Overall, the Cocobod has dropped from some 100,000 employees to less than 10,000. In areas like extension the effects have been dramatic. Workloads have doubled and Alfred Nortley, one of the College's administrators, reports that 'morale is low. It is almost impossible to do your job, and the farmers are starting to complain quite bitterly.' The College is not currently training extension workers – there are simply no jobs. This may also explain the frustration back at the Institute. It is the extension workers who are charged with transferring the Institute's agronomy on to the farmers.

No-one would seriously argue there was no fat in the Cocobod and cuts weren't needed. It had become the 'political backyard' of the government of the day. Many of its workers and functions were of marginal utility and at the cost of a better price to cocoa farmers. Today the price farmers get has risen to 50 per cent of the international price, with the Board committed to go even higher, to 65 per cent or 70 per cent. But structural adjustment is turning out to be a blunt instrument, cutting away many of the beneficial services the Cocobod did provide for small farmers. Put this together with the other effects of structural adjustment and it is by no means clear that cocoa farmers, supposedly one of the main beneficiaries of the IMF/World Bank reform package, are much better off. Not only are inputs more expensive, but the cost of living has skyrocketed. In all my time in Ghana I never heard anyone say anything positive about the impact of structural adjustment.

As we head back towards Accra my conversation with Sam shifts to other changes in the farmers' lives. The user fees in education and health have been particularly difficult. There are lots of stories about those who simply can't afford schooling. Back in Camp Number One Asamoa had listed out the charges that even the parents of elementary school-children must bear: fees for desks, fees for uniforms, fees for stationery, fees for textbooks, fees for any extras at all. Sending your kids to high school is stretching even middle-class incomes. For most, higher education is inconceivable. Sam is particularly aware of the effects on health costs. He recounts stories of people turned away from hospitals in the middle of the night, forced to carry desperately sick family members back home because they lacked the money or the banks were closed. Sam shakes his head and stares out of the window. The words come slowly. 'Ghana never used to be like this,' he says.

To help shore up public revenues and meet Ghana's obligations to international creditors, as well as cover the high cost of imports resulting from the devalued *cedi*, the IMF/World Bank package called for a value-added tax (VAT) to replace all other sales taxes. The idea was to shift some of the tax burden away from cocoa and encourage production. But when the Government tried to bring in the tax at 17 per cent even the usually peaceful Ghanaians took to the streets in protest. They cried *'kume preko'* ('kill me quickly' – as opposed to the lingering death of structural adjustment) and the police obliged, gunning down several demonstrators. The outcry was so great that the Government was forced to back down. Today they are back at it, reintroducing VAT but more slowly and at a lower level.

One expression of Ghana's vibrant popular culture can be found in the sayings, often religious, that adorn shops, trucks and buses. My personal favourite is 'Life is not a race.' Yet that is exactly what the opening of Ghana to global competition, the ultimate goal of structural adjustment, is making of life – a race where you have to run ever harder just to keep up, and God help you if you stumble, because nobody else will. Sam Nyako sometimes despairs: 'If you want to lead an honest life, you must have two or even three jobs.' But he points to the eternal optimism of Ghanaians, particularly the cocoa farmers, as a source of continuing strength. As we enter Accra's streets, clogged with the late-afternoon rush-hour, Sam breaks the momentary silence: 'Every Ghanaian believes that tomorrow will be better than today.' ■

NO CONDITION IS PERMANENT

A shop near Kumasi – this pervasive type of Ghanaian street poetry (often religious) points out the precariousness of life.

RICHARD SWIFT

Fantasy chocolate

Or what lies behind the impulse to eat

Chocolate has long been identified with romance and sensuality. Yet the connections between sex and chocolate – unless, perhaps, it is liberally spread over various parts of the body – are anything but obvious. It is true that, way back in the times of the Maya of Central America, chocolate was connected to fertility. And in the times when it was a luxury, associated with first the Spanish and then other European courts, it was popular with the ladies of the court particularly – possibly as a substitute for other, more potent and less ladylike, drugs – and was thought to have aphrodisiac qualities. However, just as chocolate has never been proved to have the detrimental effects attributed to it, so many of its positive qualities, aside from the obvious fine taste of good dark chocolate, have remained in the realm of conjecture. Recent science has, however, vindicated at least some of the pharmacological claims, indicating that chocolate may be the ideal soft drug, provoking a sense of euphoria and well-being similar to marijuana, with very few side-effects. Both benefit and liability can of course be altered, depending on what other ingredients, like sugar, hydrogenated oils or flavourings, are added.

However, the rich imagery associated with the history of chocolate has provided a virtual playground for the advertising industry. And, after all, it is advertising that is one of the main costs you are paying for when you buy a bar or box of chocolates. Much more of your money will end up in the hands of television stations, lifestyle magazines and those who create advertising 'concepts' to re-enforce the different brand names, than will ever make it back into the pockets of the world's cocoa farmers. In fact one 'with-it' firm has gone so far as to offer not only a quarter pound replica of a '$5^{1}/_{4}$ inch floppy disk' but an entire chocolate computer work-station 'comprised of chocolate terminal, chocolate keyboard, chocolate chip and chocolate byte' Their slogan; 'boots up in your mouth, not in your disk drive'. With 70 per cent of chocolate purchased on impulse and consumption concentrated around the holidays like Christmas, Easter, Halloween and St Valentine's Day the push to identify a gift of chocolate with special love for a mate or a child is obvious. Women are especially targeted in chocolate advertising and the consumption or denial of chocolate is associated with all kinds of eating disorders such as binge-eating, bulimia and anorexia.

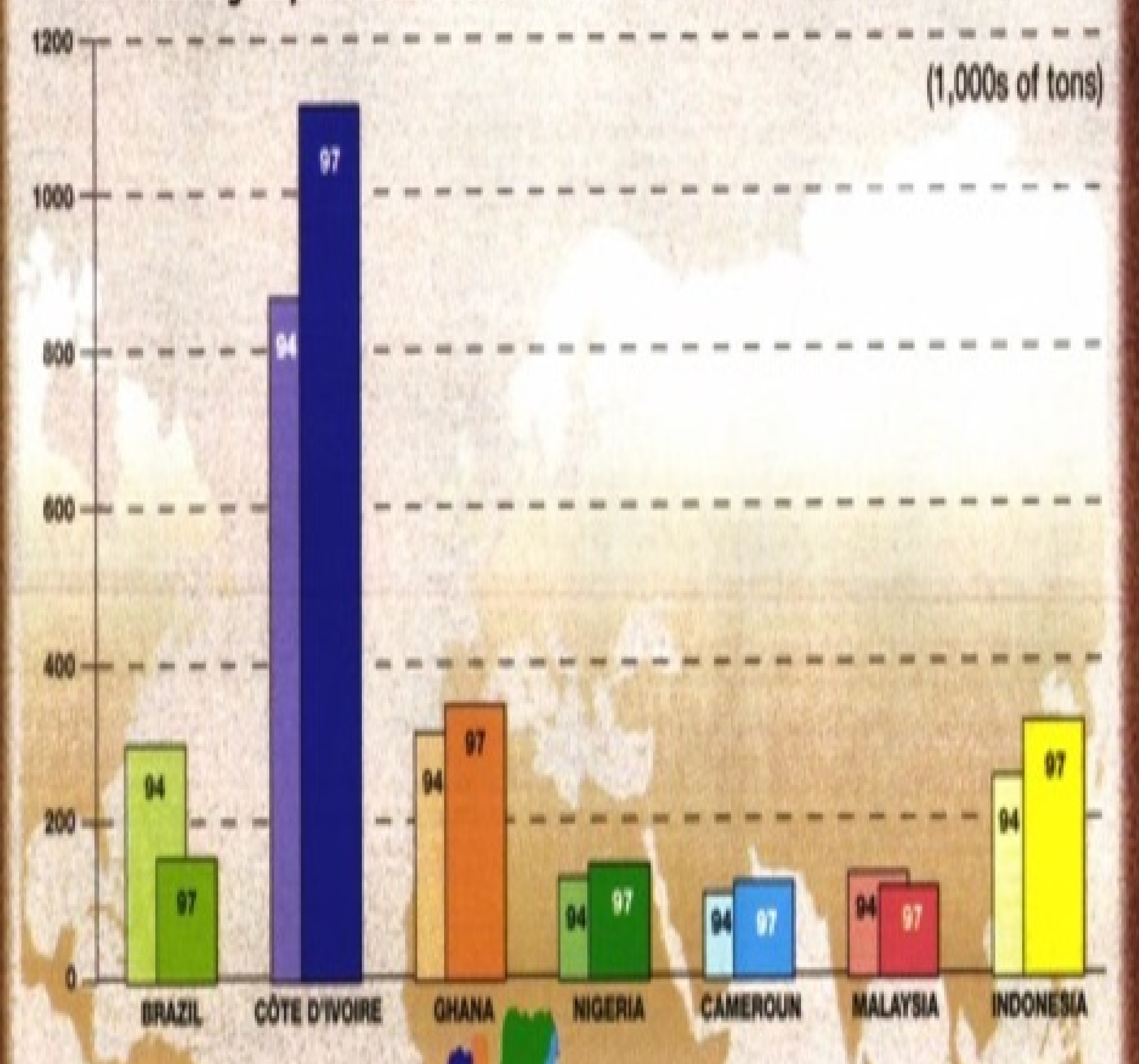
Unlike, say, car or even painkiller ads, very little of the advertising for chocolate is directly tied to claims about the superiority of one particular brand over another, or even about the intrinsic qualities of taste or actual ingredients. Instead, chocolate advertising quickly enters the world of fantasy. Love, sensuality, romance, luxury, health, energy are all yours once you've plunked down a few measly coins. Not too bad in a world where such things are widely sought-after. Indeed, who can bother with issues like cocoa content – what really makes chocolate, after all – additives, pesticide residues, sugar content, or a fair price for Third World farmers when your fundamental happiness is at stake?

Chocolate – the facts

The relationship of the bitter tropical bean to that gooey brown goodness is usually ignored. Here the NI shows how you get from cocoa to chocolate – and how much sticks to whose fingers along the way.

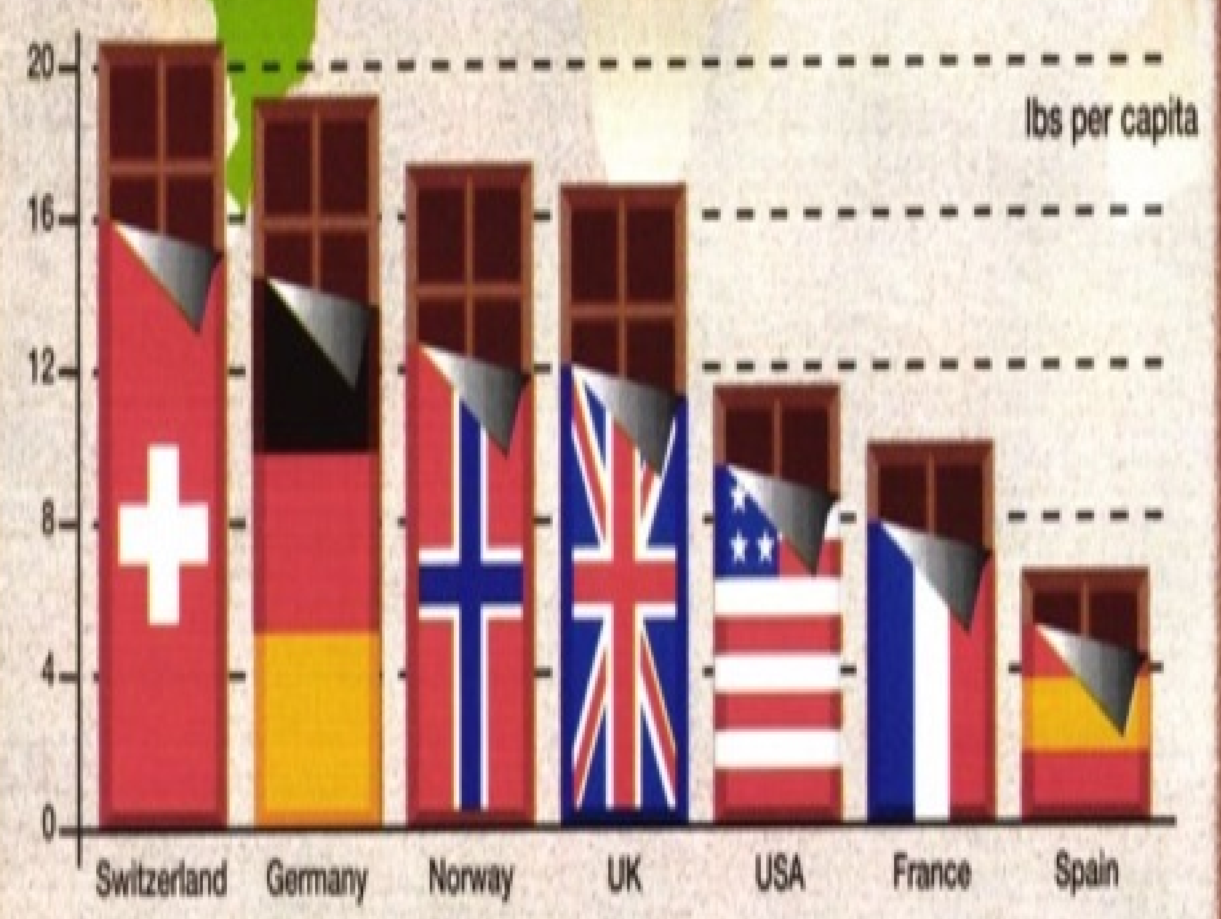
Where do the beans come from? [1]

The world's largest producers of cocoa – totals from 1994 and 1997.



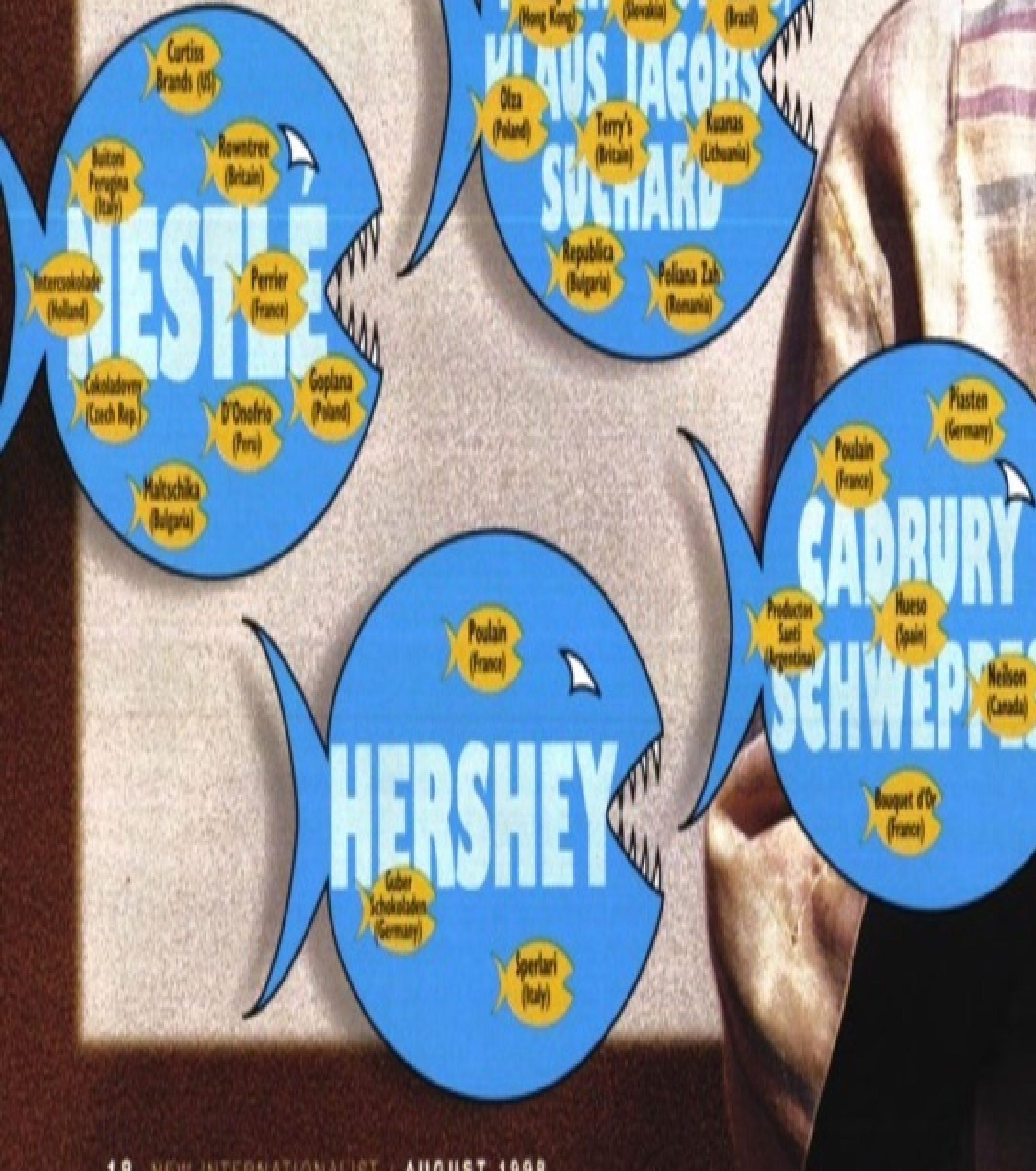
Who eats it [2]

Consumption of chocolate confectionery in 1995

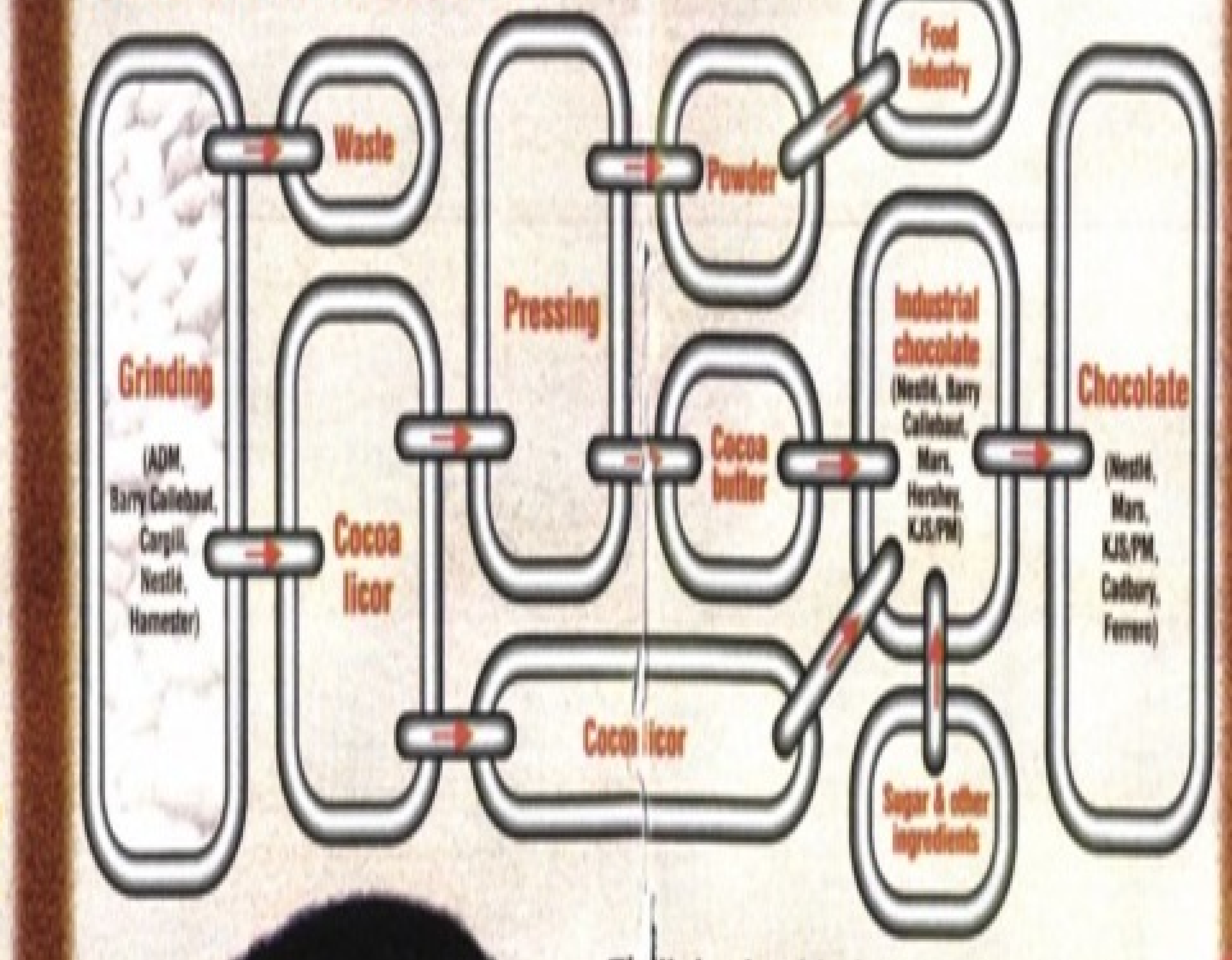


Big Chocolate [3]

Sales of chocolate are dominated by a few giant companies – 'Big Chocolate': the Mars and Hershey companies account for three-quarters of chocolate sales in the US – Cadbury, Nestlé and Mars for the same proportion in Britain. In recent years the concentration of ownership has intensified as big companies swallow up smaller ones.


NESTLÉ
Curtiss Brands (US)
Buitoni Perugina (Italy)
Rowntree (Britain)
Intercsokolade (Holland)
Perrier (France)
Cokoladovny (Czech Rep.)
D'Onofrio (Peru)
Goplana (Poland)
Maltschika (Bulgaria)
PHILIP MORRIS/ KLAUS JACOBS SUCHARD
Côte d'Or (Belgium)
FreiaMarabou (Holland)
Cumege (Hong Kong)
Figaro (Slovakia)
Lacta (Brazil)
Olza (Poland)
Terry's (Britain)
Kuanas (Lithuania)
Republica (Bulgaria)
Poliana Zah (Romania)
HERSHEY
Poulain (France)
Gaber Schokoladen (Germany)
Sperlari (Italy)
CADBURY SCHWEPPES
Piasten (Germany)
Poulain (France)
Productos Santi (Argentina)
Hueso (Spain)
Neilson (Canada)
Bouquet d'Or (France)

The cocoa chain [4]


Grinding
(ADM, Barry Callebaut, Cargill, Nestlé, Hamester)
Waste
Cocoa licor
Pressing
Powder
Food industry
Cocoa butter
Cocoa licor
Industrial chocolate (Nestlé, Barry Callebaut, Mars, Hershey, KJS/PM)
Sugar & other ingredients
Chocolate
(Nestlé, Mars, KJS/PM, Cadbury, Ferrero)

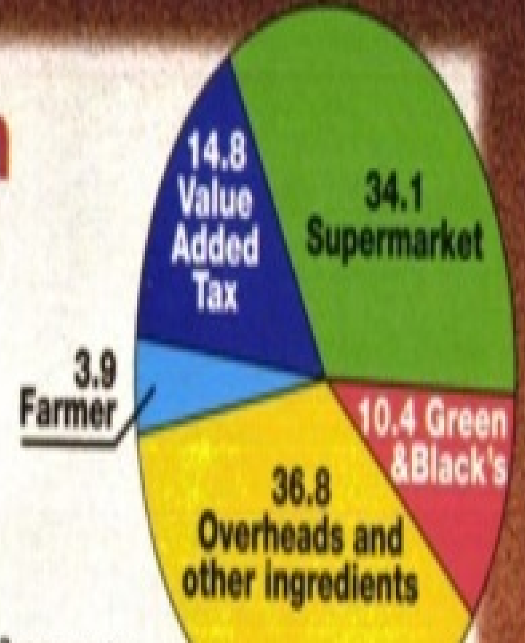
Th links that bind cocoa to chocolate

Cadbury's
DAIRY MILK
Milk Chocolate
e125g
COCOA SOLIDS 20%

Bar breakdown

Who gets what from a bar of chocolate

Green and Black's Maya Gold (fairly-traded) [6]



% of final price

Fairly-traded Maya Gold gives 5.3 pence to the cocoa farmer for every bar it sells for £1.35. Of this, 0.3 pence comes from the fair-trade premium. This may seem like a small amount, but it can make a big difference to the farmer. More important still is the cocoa content: Maya Gold contains 55% cocoa solids, whereas most of the popular bars in Britain and North America contain just 20%. So, from a typical milk-chocolate bar selling for 90p, a Ghanaian farmer can expect to see just 0.5 pence.

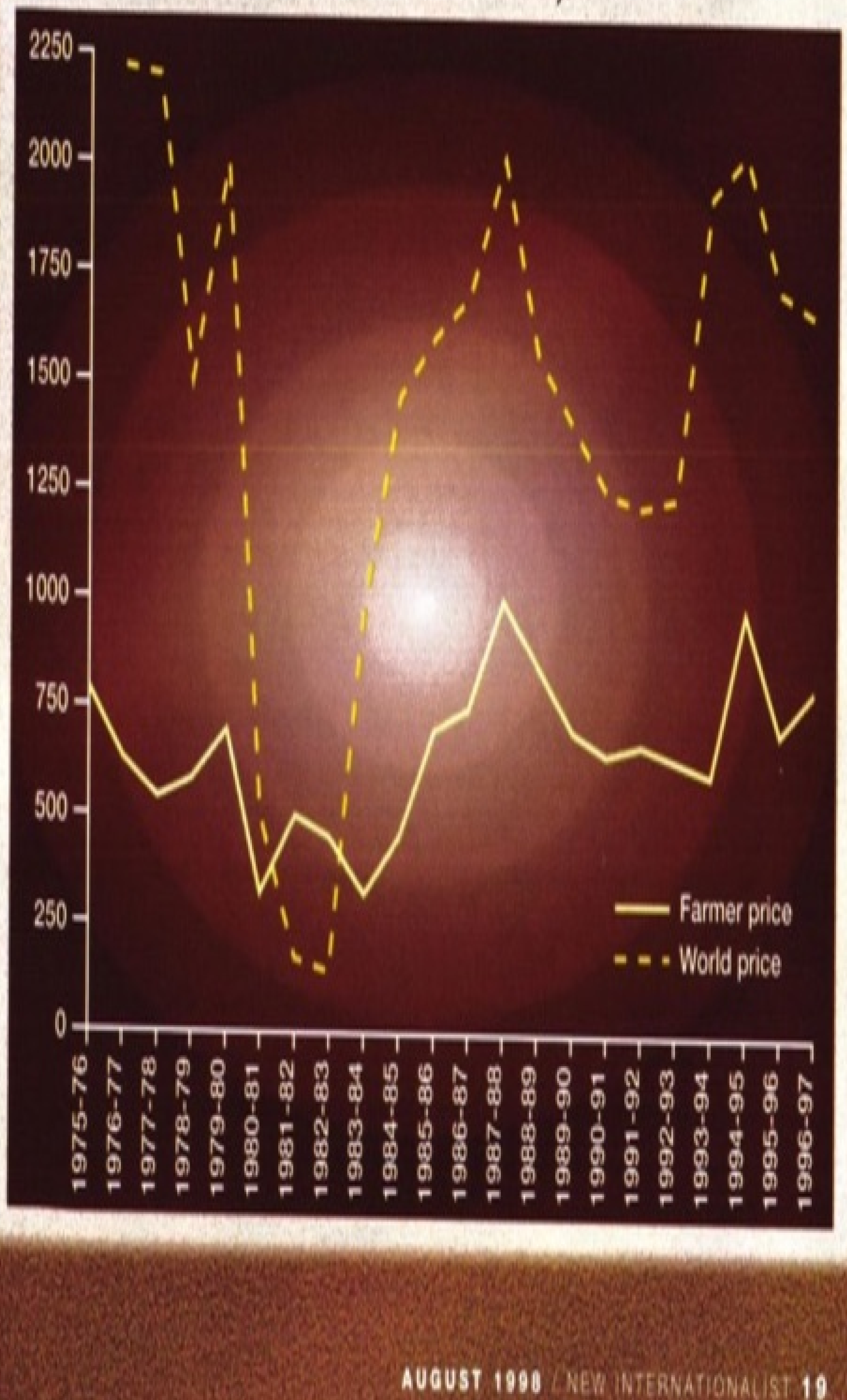
COCOA SOLIDS 55%
GREEN & BLACK'S
MAYA GOLD
ORGANIC DARK CHOCOLATE
OF RAINFOREST SPICES & ORANGES
WITH THE AUTHENTIC MAYA TASTE

COCOA SOLIDS 40%
GOLDEN TREE
TETTEH QUARSHIE BAR
★ TQ BAR ★
Dark Chocolate
Chocolat noir surfin
شكولاتة داكنة
Award-winning Ghanaian chocolate, kept out of Europe by Trade Barriers.

COCOA SOLIDS 25%
Galaxy
(A Mars product)

Riding the roller-coaster [5]

Ghanaian farmers get a relatively stable, but extremely small, proportion of an international price for cocoa beans that has fluctuated wildly.



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1 Cocoa Research Institute, *Cocoa Production Statistics*, Ohio State University. 2 Caobisco IOCCC, *Statistical Bulletin*, (Summer 1995). 3 *Fair Trade Yearbook*, 1994 and *Cocoa Newsletter*, No 3. 4 *Cocoa Newsletter*, No 7. 5 *Cocoa Market Liberalization*, The Cocoa Association (1997). 6 Information from Green and Black's.

KUAPA KOKOO
LTD.
P.O. Box 23044, ASH-TOWN KSI. TEL. 23277
MY BROTHER

The cocoa action in Kumasi: Nana Anson works to build a farmers' organization from the bottom up.

Best of the best

Why Ghana's cocoa farmers are no longer content to be used as pawns in the international cocoa-marketing game, and are building their community organization and fair trade instead.

THE headquarters of Kuapa Kokoo are on a tree-lined street near the main stadium in the Ashante capital of Kumasi – Ghana's second-largest city and the heart of cocoa country. Its offices occupy the two floors of a large villa-like building. The number of comings and goings is a good hint that this is where a lot of the cocoa action in town takes place. Despite the obvious busyness, this is no stuffy office. Cocoa farmers sit around chatting, and some have spent the night on the floor of a large sleeping room – testament to the comfort and sense of ownership of Kuapa members.

Kuapa has several faces. It is at once a farmers' union, a cocoa-purchasing company and a trust fund for its members. It started back in 1993 when Nana Jampon, a far-sighted farmer's representative on Cocobod, realized that the partial privatization of internal purchase might leave cocoa farmers at the mercy of unscrupulous private companies. He feared a return to the bad old days when traders and moneylenders preyed on defenseless farmers. The best way to avoid this, he surmised, was for the farmers to organize themselves to collect, sell and profit from their own cocoa. To do this the union had to set up its own purchasing company, as under Ghanaian company law it was illegal for a co-operative to buy cocoa.

Asamoah and I make our way to the office of Nana Anson, who is the Society Development Officer of Kuapa. A local society is the basic building block of Kuapa and can vary from dozens to hundreds of members. When it started, Kuapa had 22 local societies – that has now mushroomed to 160. Nana Anson estimates that there are 30,000 members spread right across Ghana's cocoa belt.

Anson is a short, balding man of formidable intellect – *Nana* is the Ashante designation for a traditional chief. He has the tactical and strategic sense to blend the desirable and the possible without giving up either. This is crucial for fledgling grassroots organizations such as Kuapa, which needs to avoid becoming a voice in the wilderness or falling into business-as-usual cronyism. He spends a good deal of time on the road, strengthening existing societies or establishing new ones. He balances a passionate commitment to the cocoa farmers' cause with caution based on his knowledge of the importance of the annual crop to the whole country: 'Ghana has developed on the back of the cocoa farmer: roads, hospitals, schools, everything comes from cocoa.'

It is ironic that it is the structural-adjustment program, so unpopular throughout Ghana, that has given the space for Kuapa to exist. It forced Cocobod to give up its monopoly on internal purchase, allowing the farmers themselves to take over this function. Nana Anson is optimistic that the Cocobod will keep its word and allow the producer price to rise to 55 per cent or even 60 per cent of the international price soon. But, while he shares the farmers' enthusiasm for increased prices, he is cautious about the total liberalization of cocoa marketing that is being pushed by the World Bank and the IMF. He points to other countries in West Africa, such as Cameroon, Nigeria and – to a lesser extent – Côte d'Ivoire, where opening up cocoa purchase and export to external companies has led to a perilous deterioration in quality and a rush for quick profits. 'Ghana produces the best cocoa in the world and we get a premium on the price. It is the Cocobod's Quality Control Division that is largely responsible for maintaining these standards,' he cautions. He is also quick to underline other deleterious effects of adjustment policies on farmers, such as the collapse of a once-vital rural-credit system, due to reforms imposed under the IMF-imposed Financial Sector Adjustment Programme. Most farmers can no longer meet the stringent criteria for collateral demanded by the banks and end up either without vital credit, or borrowing from private moneylenders and purchasing companies at rates of up to 100-per-cent interest. 'This is exactly what had happened to Moussa back in Camp,' says Asamoah.

It is not hard to figure out the attraction Kuapa has for Ghana's cocoa farmers. Not only do they run their own show, but it's a much better deal. This past year, for example, Kuapa paid an extra 500 *cedis* per bag over and above the Cocobod price. An additional 300 *cedis* per bag went into the coffers of the local societies. At the end of the year four representatives from each society – two women and two men – come to Kumasi for a big meeting to divide up the year's profits. In the last two years this has amounted to 700 *cedis* per bag. With the *cedi* hovering at about 2,300 per US dollar, this may seem like small potatoes – but for a hard-pressed farmer it can make a big difference.

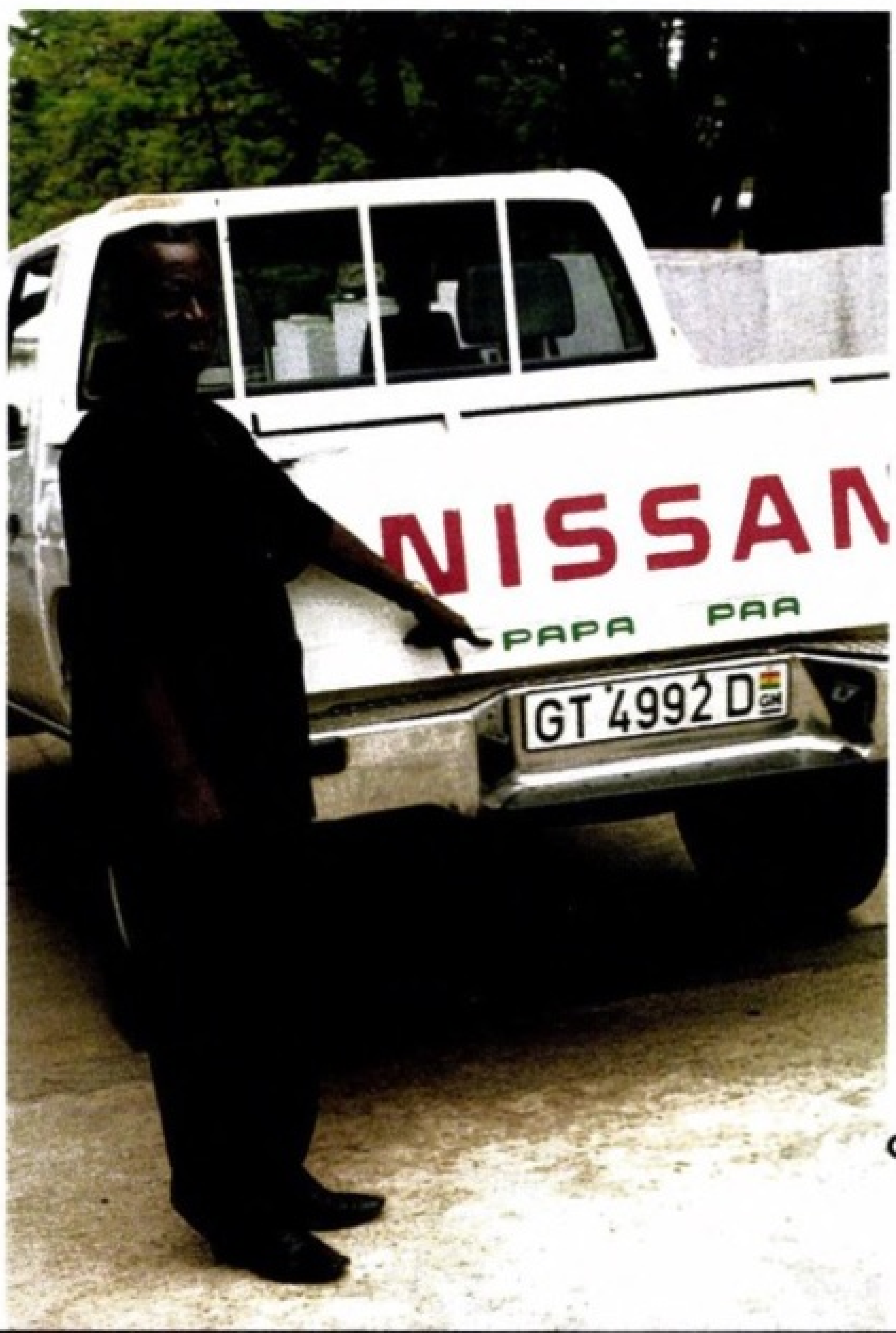
About 11 per cent of Kuapa's output is sold to fair-trade organizations in Europe – these include Gepa in Germany and Coopéracion in Switzerland, as well as the Body Shop, which uses fair-traded cocoa butter in its line of natural cosmetics. The British-based fair-trade organization, Twin Trading, helps orchestrate these arrangements. However, they are by no means assured, as I learn when I meet the no-nonsense Managing Director of the buying company. He expresses some fear that fair-trade organizations may not buy the full amount of cocoa that Kuapa has allotted for them this year.

On what they do purchase, these fair-traders return a premium to Kuapa which varies from 10 to 20 per cent of the world price. The percentage goes up as the price drops and goes down as it increases, to compensate for speculative market fluctuation. I assume that this premium goes right back to the farmers, but am pleasantly surprised when Nana Anson explains to me that it goes into a trust fund to support community infrastructure. 'Already $246,000 has been accumulated and, starting this March, proposals will be taken from different communities for such things as health centres, water boreholes, improvements to schools and credit schemes.' Asamoah is quick off the mark to mention an upgrade for the school building and a loan scheme to help bankrupt farmers as potential Camp projects. It is interesting that Kuapa members have opted for funds to go for common welfare rather than to support individual farmers.

Kuapa members have opted for funds to go for common welfare rather than to support individual farmers

Kuapa has also recently hired a sustainable-agriculture officer to teach integrated pest management, and a gender-and-development officer to ensure the empowerment and financial well-being of women members. Nana Anson points out that a large number of farmers can no longer afford expensive imported pesticides, now that adjustment policies have removed price subsidies. Cocoa is, worldwide, one of the most highly sprayed of all food crops. So going at least partially 'organic' is a practical as well as a philosophical step. Also, organic is popular with the fair-trade organizations who need '*papa paaa...*' – which, as both Asamoah and Nana Anson drown each other out to remind me, means 'best of the best'. The license plates of all the Kuapa trucks have *papa paa* neatly inscribed under each plate number.

Papa Paa – 'best of the best':
Kuapa farmers take pride in their cocoa.



I worry out loud that the ageing farmer population – most are in their sixties or seventies – plus a liberalized market situation may result in the sale of farm land and the centralization of cocoa production in much larger units. Nana Anson expresses scepticism that this would ever happen. His faith is based on the importance of cocoa farms to the rural culture of Ghana. 'I cannot imagine a farmer, whose inheritance and personal security and even sense of self are tied up with the cocoa farm, ever walking away from it. We try and encourage cocoa farmers to think about their farms in a businesslike manner, but most farmers still regard them primarily as a way of life.' It is one of the strengths of Kuapa that, while it works to strengthen the economic position of farmers, it is also dedicated to defending and improving this way of life by empowering farmers and protecting the environment in which they work.

Once we leave Kumasi and make our way back to the coast and Accra I get a further sense of Asamoah's commitment to Kuapa. It is the night we are finally to fly to Britain and we are having supper at the house of one of Asamoah's former students, who is now in business in Accra. He is one of the people who has fared well in Ghana's new market-friendly economy. With typical Ghanaian hospitality and allegiance to extended family, his new house has become at least a temporary living space for some 14 or 15 people. Among the temporary residents is his brother – a cocoa farmer from the Western region. As we sit around the compound yard in the twilight, Asamoah explains to the brother why he is going to London. The conversation is now in Twi and the speed and intensity of discussion precludes translation. Asamoah waves an issue of the **NI** on fair-traded coffee and gesticulates about how little both coffee and cocoa farmers make from the final consumer price of their product. When the conversation quiets down I ask Asamoah for a brief translation. He indicates the brother and says: 'He used to sell some of his cocoa to Kuapa, but most to the Cocobod. But now he will sell it all to Kuapa.' He proclaims, with the pride of an evangelist amongst a flock of new converts: 'I have convinced him.' If Asamoah is anything to go by, Kuapa will be a force to be reckoned with for a long time to come. ■

PHOTOS BY RICHARD SWIFT

NI traces the history of the growing passion for chocolate and the shifting source of the magic bean from which it springs.

Illustrations by Ato de Graft-Johnson

Oh, divine chocolate!
They grind thee kneeling,
Beat thee with hands praying.
And drink thee with eyes to heaven.

MARCO ANTONIO ORELLANA

Chocolate follies

From

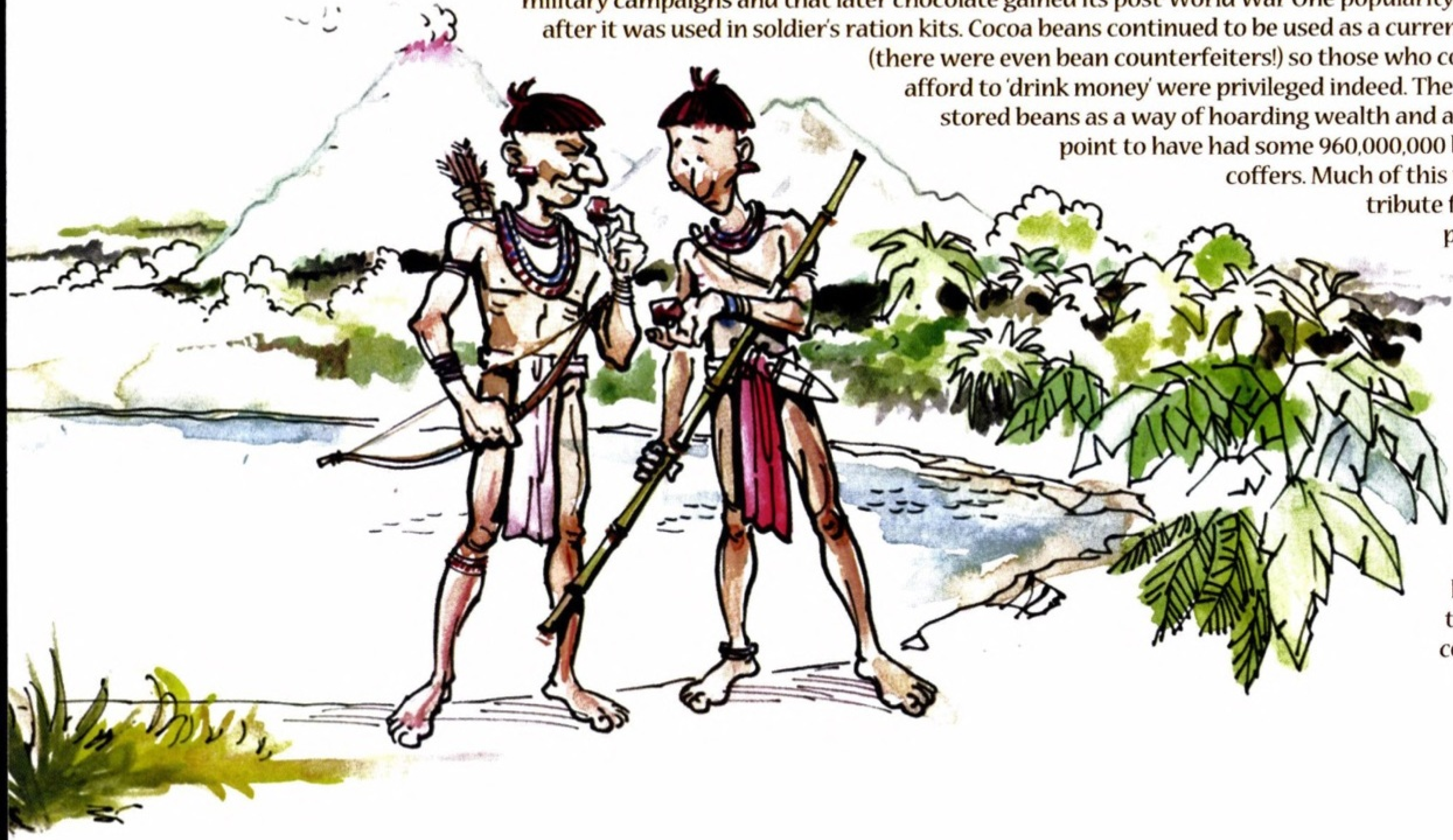
to M

SACRED SPICE

The first known use of the cocoa bean to make a spicy (not sweet) chocolate drink dates back to the Mayan empire of what is today Southern Mexico and Guatemala. Here the cocoa bean can still be found growing wild in the bush of coastal Chiapas and neighbouring northern Guatemala. For the Maya cocoa and the thick 'chocolatl' drink that it rendered were a symbol of sanctity, evoking both fertility and prosperity. Mayan priests are the first to have made the drink during the classical Mayan period from about AD 250 to 900. The bean was so highly valued that it was used as a form of currency at a fixed market rate — you could get a rabbit for ten beans, a slave cost a hundred and a prostitute went from eight to ten 'according to how they agree.'

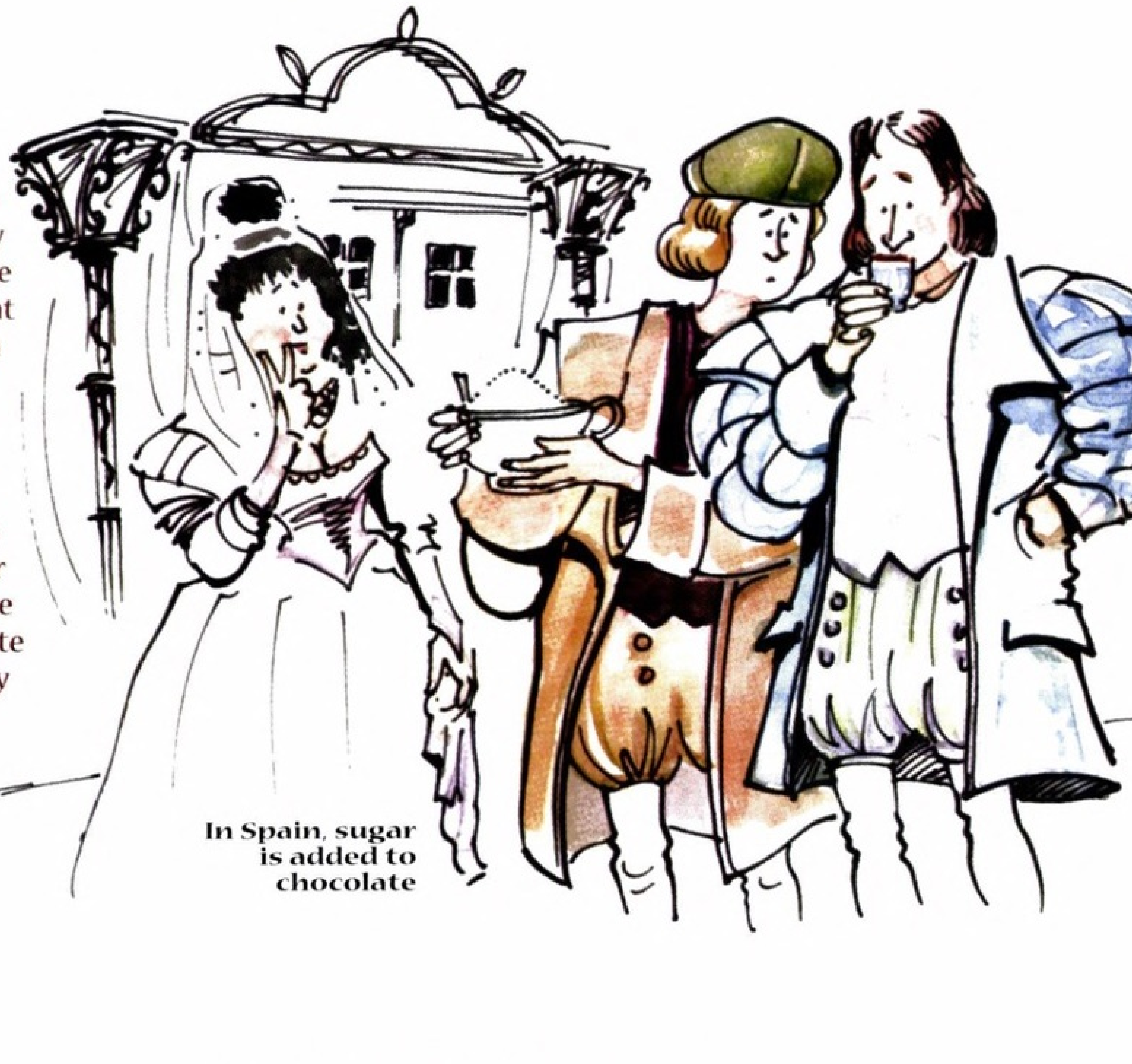
SPOILS OF WAR

With the inexplicable and much-debated collapse of Mayan civilization the use of chocolate spread north (probably carried by Mayan traders) to the hierarchical Aztec Empire of central Mexico. Here the drink was restricted to the élite of warriors, merchants and priests who held sway over Aztec life. It is interesting that Aztec warriors carried light high-energy chocolate on military campaigns and that later chocolate gained its post-World War One popularity after it was used in soldier's ration kits. Cocoa beans continued to be used as a currency (there were even bean counterfeiters!) so those who could actually afford to 'drink money' were privileged indeed. The Aztec emperors stored beans as a way of hoarding wealth and are reported at one point to have had some 960,000,000 beans in the royal coffers. Much of this was undoubtedly tribute from subject peoples invaded by the warlike Aztecs. When chocolate was prepared it was with great ceremony, paying careful attention to the foaming process and adding a delicate mixture of spices, honey and flowers to get a recipe correct.



SPANISH PRIZE

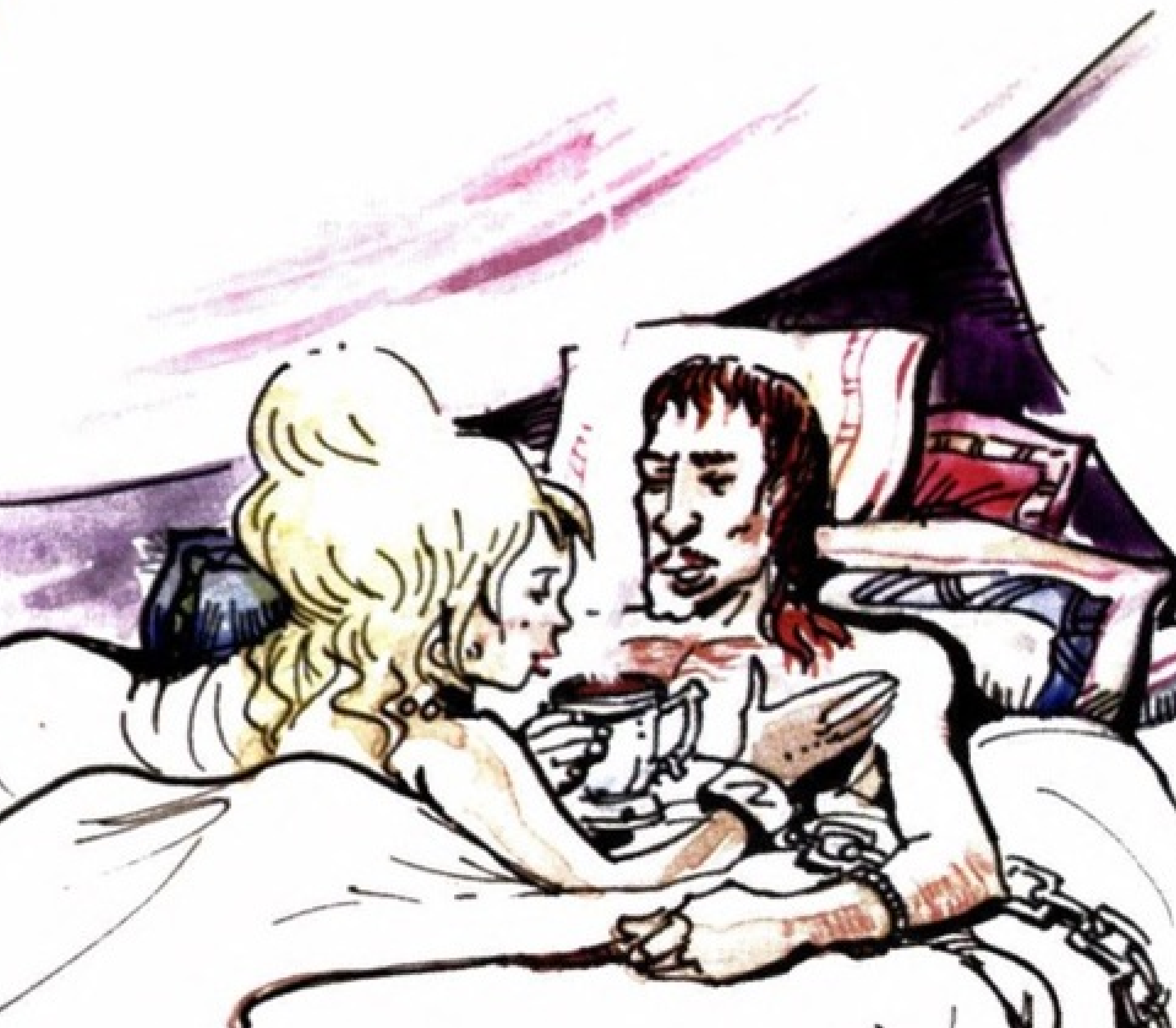
Unlike the Aztec's gold, chocolate was not immediately to the taste of the barbaric Spaniards who slaughtered any Amerindians who would not accept the domination of the Spanish crown. One commentator at the time shook his head at the bitter-tasting drink, claiming it was more fit for pigs than people. But innovation through the adding of sugar transformed chocolate for the sweet European palate and it grew in popularity, particularly with the ladies of the Spanish court. Other innovations included taking the liquid hot rather than cold and producing it as a tablet that was readily transportable and crumbled into a powder from which the chocolate drink could be concocted. For nearly a century chocolate remained a secret of the Spanish aristocracy virtually unknown in the rest of Europe. Rumour had it that the strong taste of chocolate was useful for covering up poisons. The fanatical Charles the Second of Spain is reported to have sat sipping chocolate while observing victims of the inquisition being put to death.



In Spain, sugar is added to chocolate

DISPUTED CHARACTER

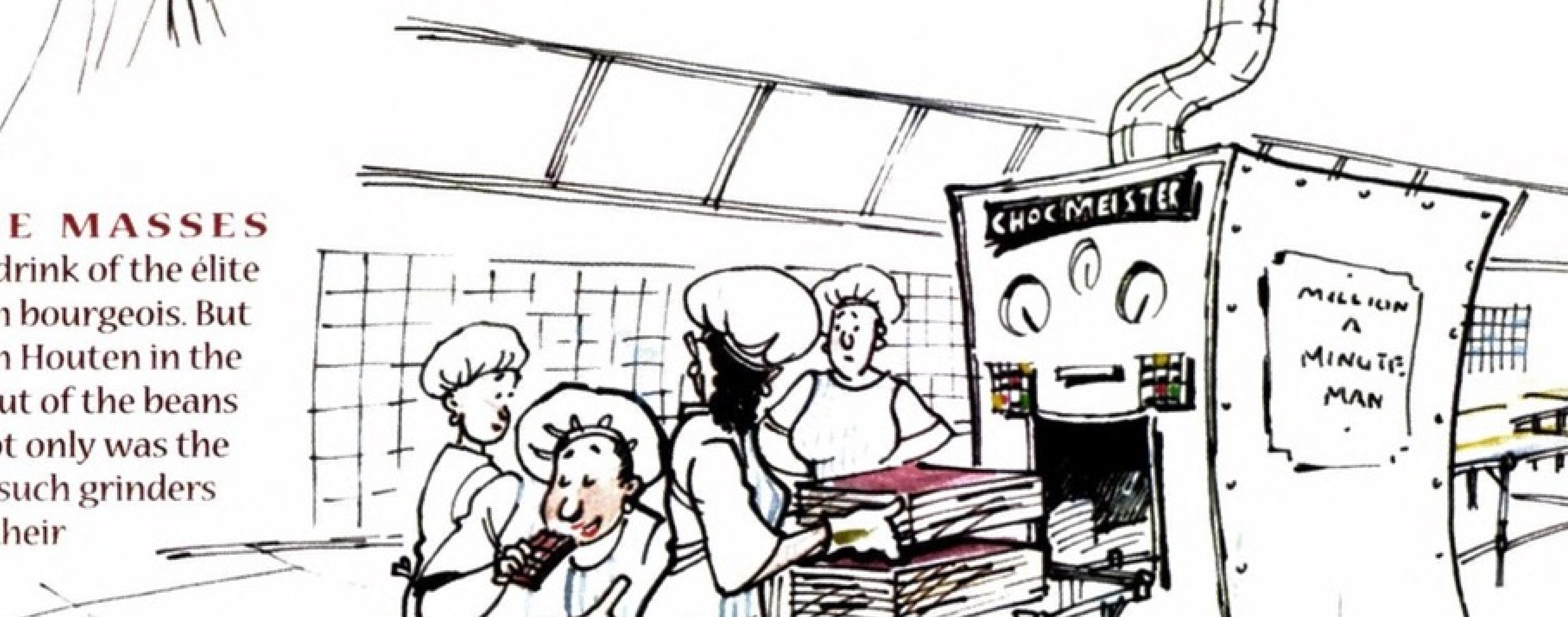
When chocolate finally escaped the Iberian peninsula it remained an item of luxury consumption to be consumed only by people of means. Even with the establishment of chocolate houses in London, a tax of 75p a pound kept the price out of reach of most ordinary folk. The spread of chocolate led to a debate as to its medical and temperamental value that still rages to this day. Early theories of human metabolism were based on the balance of hot and cold 'humours' and various experts disputed whether chocolate would cool the overheated ardour or heat normally cooler passions. This anticipates later debates as to the aphrodisiac nature of chocolate and its effects as a dangerous stimulant to the emotions or relatively harmless substitute for alcohol and other drugs. The Marquis de Sade's status as one of the earliest-known 'chocoholics' adds a certain spice to such speculations.



The Marquis de Sade's aphrodisiac

CHOCOLATE FOR THE MASSES

For some twenty-eight centuries chocolate had been a drink of the élite from Aztec emperors to French courtiers and the English bourgeois. But with the invention of a cocoa press by the Dutchman Van Houten in the late 19th century that extracted the cocoa butter out of the beans leaving a powder of cocoa solids — all that changed. Not only was the noble trade of cocoa grinder put into jeopardy (over 150 such grinders plied their trade in Madrid alone where they formed their own guild) but a vast new confectionery industry came into being. The Cadbury company which brought the press to England was soon churning out both powder and candy bars as fast as the machinery would work. They were quickly joined by Rowntree in Britain and Milton Hershey and later Forest E Mars who set up plants in Pennsylvania and Chicago respectively. To this day these and a few other firms from continental Europe, most prominently the gigantic Nestlé corporation based in Switzerland, dominate the growing global chocolate market.



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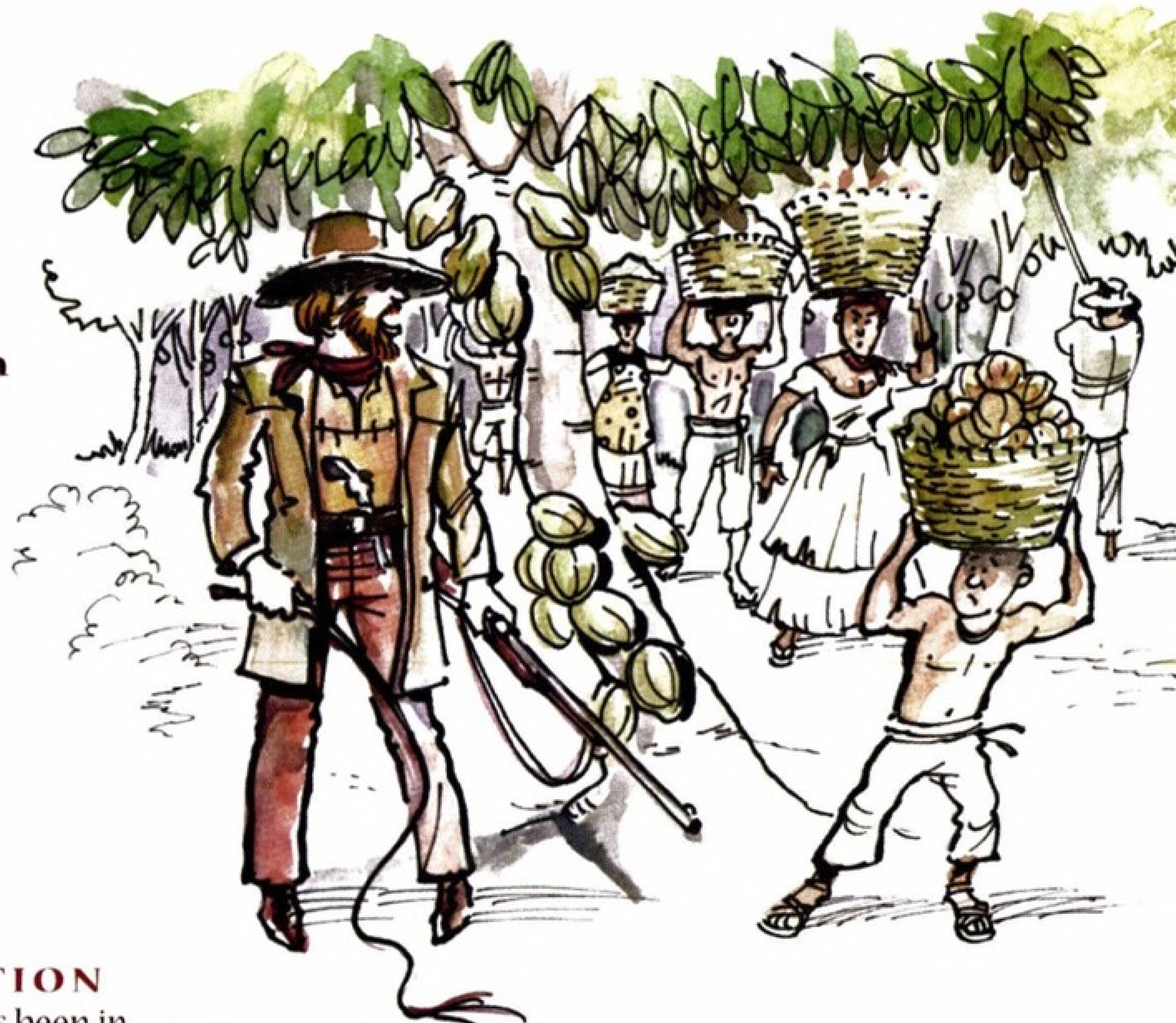


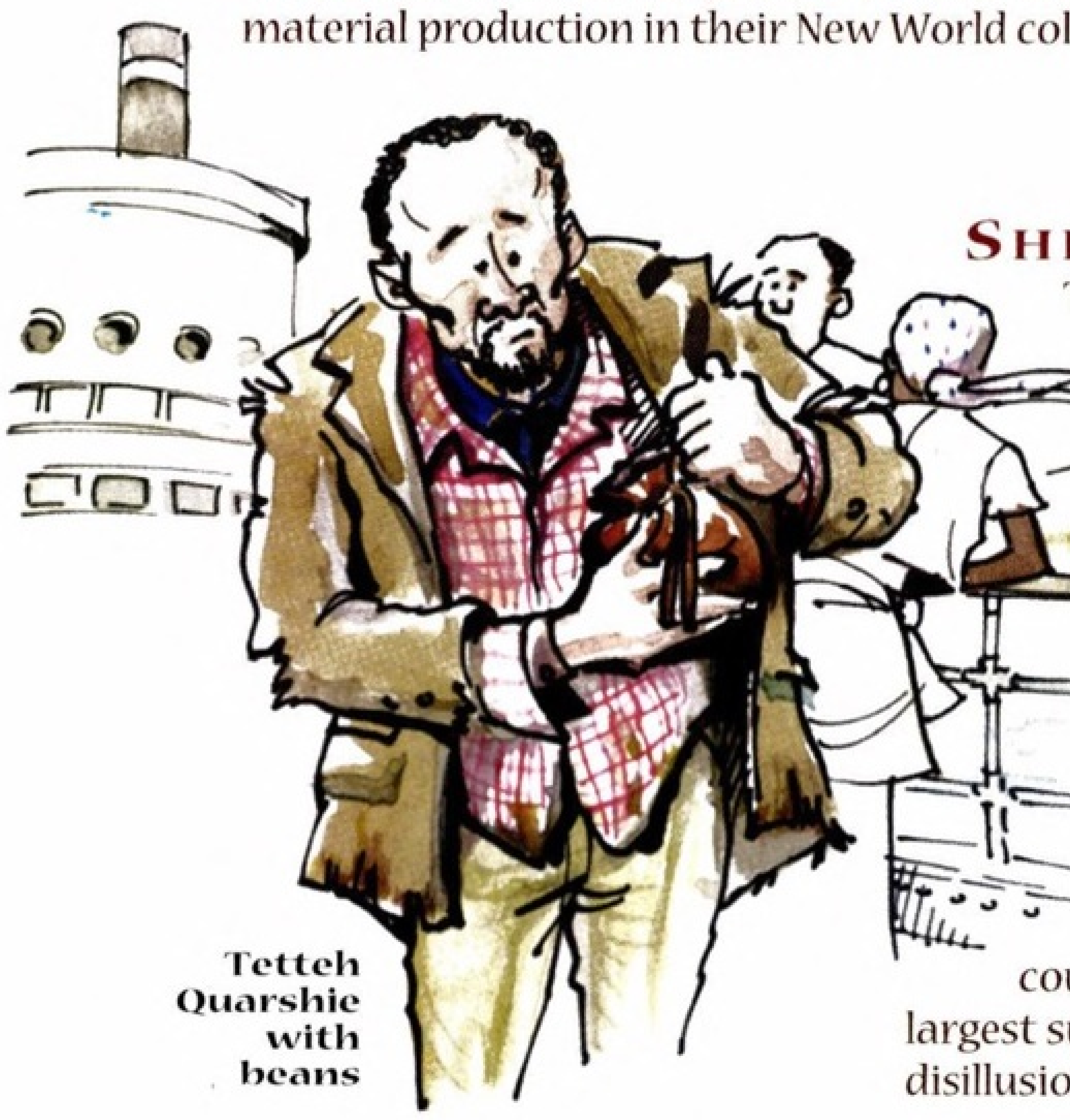
If you want to send your children to school, it is cocoa
If you want to build a house, it is cocoa
If you want to marry, it is cocoa
If you want to buy cloth, it is cocoa
If you want to buy a lorry, it is cocoa
Whatever you want to do in this world
It is with cocoa money that you do it.

GHANAIAN 1950S HIGH-LIFE TUNE

Source of the bean

Slavish devotion

Despite all the talk of Swiss chocolate the source of cocoa has always been in tropical or semitropical agriculture. The Spanish empire in the Americas initially used Amerindian labour in first Mexico and Guatemala and then Ecuador and Venezuela to provide the raw material for the favoured drink of the European aristocrats. But by the end of the 17th Century all but 10 per cent of the original native population had succumbed to a combination of harsh repression, disease and slave labour imposed by their Spanish overlords. The new source of agricultural labour was slaves ripped from their societies in West Africa and transported across the Atlantic in the now infamous 'triangular' trade by which shiploads of cocoa eventually arrived in Spanish ports. Nor were the Spanish alone in this dark enterprise as the French, English, and Portuguese used African slaves to expand cocoa and other agricultural raw-material production in their New World colonies. The Dutch brought as many as 100,000 unfortunate slaves a year through their tiny Caribbean colony in Curacao.



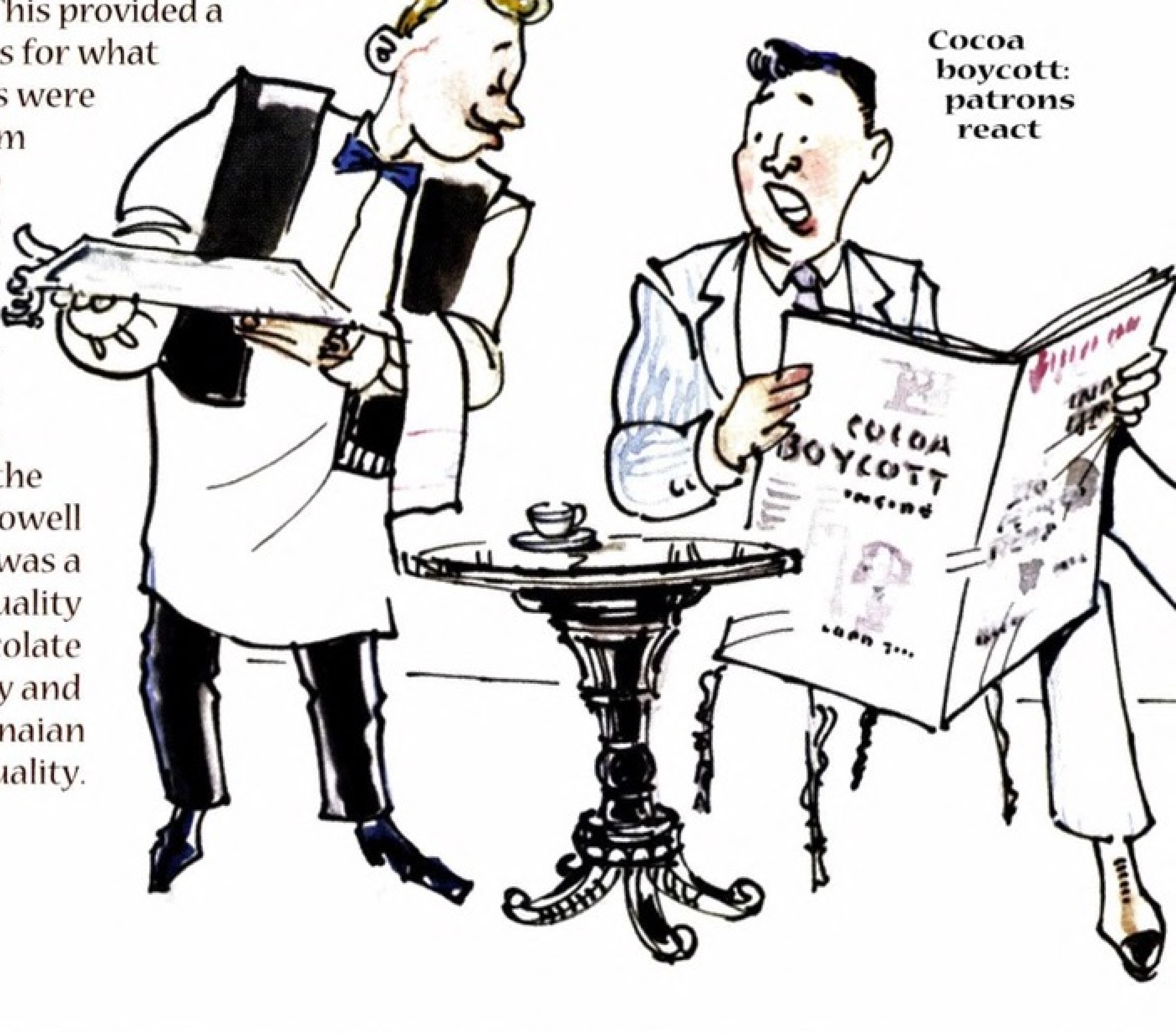
Tetteh Quarshie with beans

Shifting production

Today less than 2 per cent of cocoa comes from Mexico where the Mayans first sipped their sacred but bitter concoctions. In a rich historical irony and a major prefiguring of today's global economy, world cocoa production shifted to West Africa at the end of the 19th century. The region that had once provided the slaves to grow the New World's cocoa now became the major source of global supply. From the island colonies of Portuguese Africa São Tomé and Fernando Po cuttings of the cocoa tree were transported first to the Gold Coast and then Nigeria and finally in 1905 to the French colony of Côte d'Ivoire which is today's largest producer. In Ghana it is held that the cocoa seedlings were not an imposition of colonial merchants but were smuggled into the country by a Ghanaian carpenter named Tetteh Quarshie in 1878. Ghana was to be the world's largest supplier of the bean from 1910 to 1979 when poor prices combined with other circumstances to disillusion many of the small farmers who were the backbone of Ghana's cocoa economy.

Price and quality

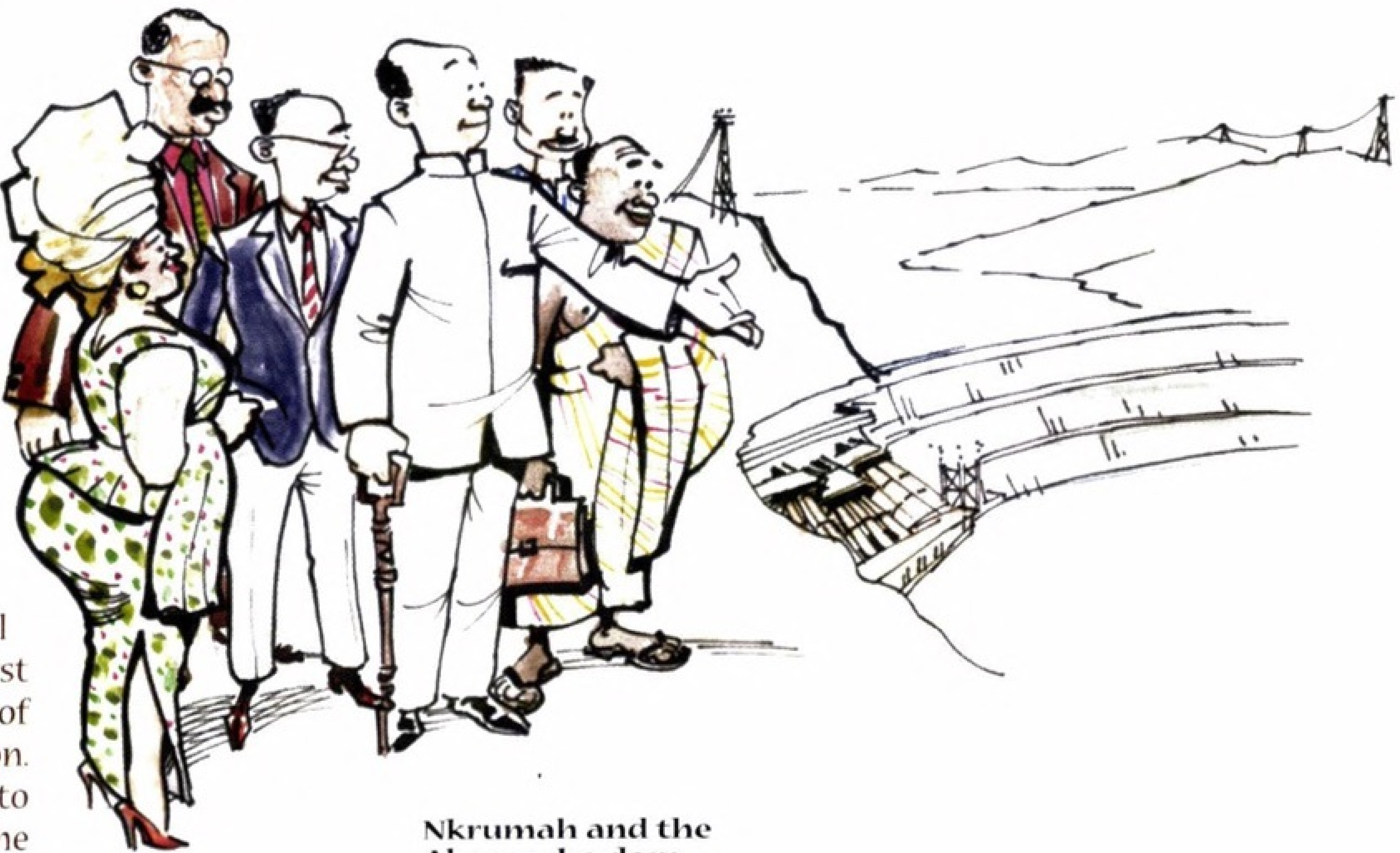
In colonial times the British-based companies who purchased Gold Coast (the rather wishful British name for their colony in Ghana) cocoa beans such as the United Africa Company also held the monopoly for the sale of industrial goods in the local market. This provided a significant advantage to these firms who could profit by high charges for what they imported and the lowest possible price to the farmers. The beans were then sold on to the big chocolate manufacturers. Under this system there was naturally increasing resentment amongst farmers who seldom benefitted from increases in the international price but were made to pay for any price drops. In an attempt to resist arbitrary price-setting farmers simply refused to sell their beans to buyers. One such boycott following the 1929 depression led to the formation by Tete-Ansa of the West African Co-operative Producers Association as an alternative marketing channel that would break the expatriate stranglehold. Another boycott in the late 1930s held cocoa beans off the market for many months and led to the establishment of the Nowell Commission to investigate pricing policies. Also at this time there was a struggle between Cadbury and the United Africa Company over the quality of beans. In those days Cadbury wanted high quality for their chocolate while the United Africa Company was primarily interested in quantity and price as there was a market for all grades of beans. To this day Ghanaian beans earn premium price for their high quality.



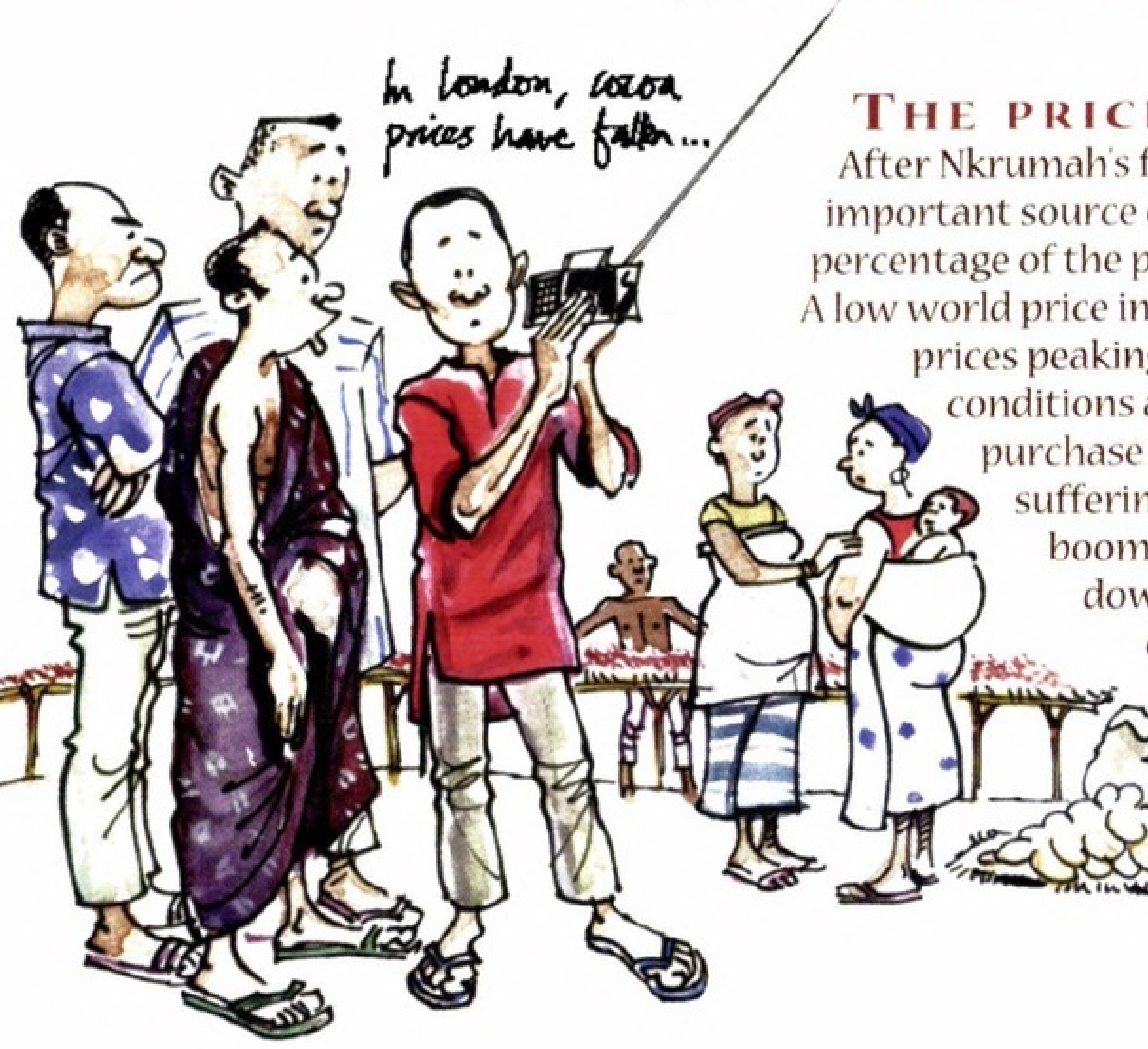
Cocoa boycott: patrons react

NKRUMAH AND COCOA

The late 1950s and early 1960s were exciting days in Ghana as the country became the first independent state in sub-Saharan Africa. The leadership of Kwame Nkrumah with his radical nationalism and Pan-Africanism pushed an ambitious vision of Ghana's future. Plans for industrialization, electrification, import substitution and a revolution in education had to be underwritten by the foreign exchange earned from minerals, timber and most importantly cocoa. Given the boom prices of the 1950s (although most profits never made it back to the Gold Coast) this did not seem unrealistic. But although production increased by a third, the international price fell by more than this. Newly independent Ghana's first seven-year economic plan was based on an international price of £180 a ton but by 1965 the price of cocoa had fallen to £65 a ton. Enemies of Nkrumah's radical model for Africa were quick to bring massive pressure to bear. The Ghanaian Cocobod (the national marketing board) was forced into unpopular cuts in the price paid to farmers. Poor prices not only undermined Nkrumah's ambitious economic program but helped sap his political support leading to the military coup which eventually was his downfall.



Nkrumah and the Akosombo dam.

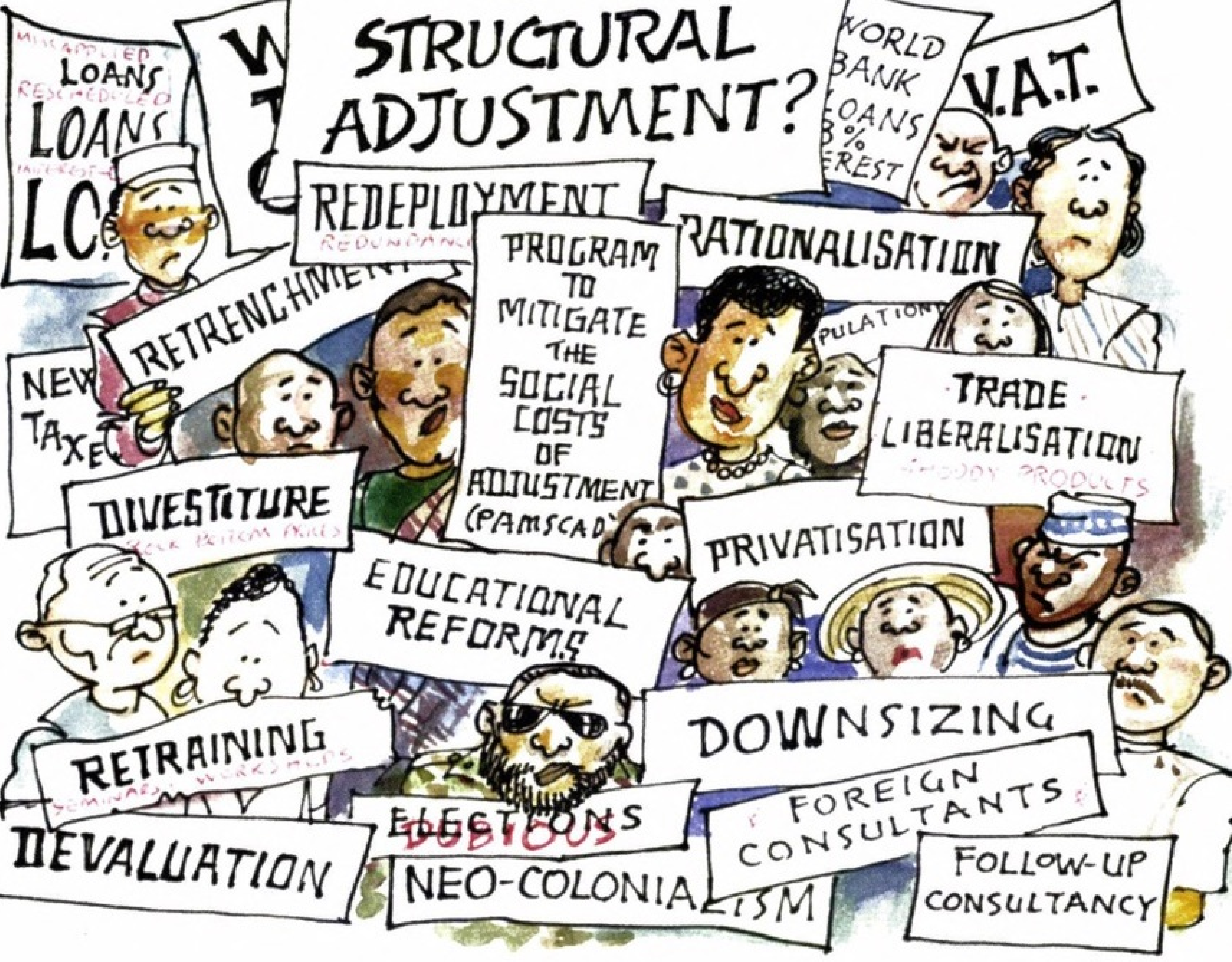

In London, cocoa prices have fallen...

THE PRICE ROLLER-COASTER

After Nkrumah's fall the revenue earned from cocoa became an ever-more important source of financial support for the Ghanaian state. As a result the percentage of the price paid to farmers went into steady decline until the early 1980s. A low world price in the early 1970s gave way to a boom by the end of the decade with prices peaking at nearly £3,000 a ton in 1977. This was partly due to poor weather conditions affecting supply and partly due to speculation. But with internal purchase and price controlled by the powerful Cocobod, farmers ended up suffering far more from low prices than they ever benefited from the price boom. As a result many Ghanaian farmers voted with their feet, cut down their trees for timber and planted food crops instead. This combined with very dry weather and a disastrous series of bush fires resulted in a plunge of Ghanaian cocoa production from about 30 per cent of the world total to less than 12 per cent by the early 1980s.

THE ERA OF LIBERAL COMPETITION

After a more modest price boom in the mid-1980s the chocolate companies, wholesale buyers and aid agencies encouraged a number of new countries to get into cocoa production as a high-value 'miracle' commodity. As a result a number of Asian countries like Malaysia and Indonesia (and soon Vietnam) set up large cocoa plantations and Brazil and other Latin American countries increased their production. The result was as intended — an increase in supply and a drop in price. In West Africa, particularly Ghana, cocoa remains a small-holder crop and massive agrochemical plantations are rare. A regime of liberal market economics, according to recipes developed in the Washington kitchen of the International Monetary Fund, is now the economic orthodoxy of the region. While this has resulted in a better internal cocoa price for Ghanaian farmers, new health and education charges, skyrocketing prices for agricultural chemicals and a stagnant world price have mostly undermined any improvement.


WHO NEEDS STRUCTURAL ADJUSTMENT?
MISAPPLIED LOANS
RESCHEDULED LOANS
INTEREST LO
WORLD BANK LOANS 8% INTEREST
V.A.T.
REDEPLOYMENT
REDUNDANCY
RETRENCHMENT
PROGRAM TO MITIGATE THE SOCIAL COSTS OF ADJUSTMENT (PAMSCAD)
RATIONALISATION
POPULATION
NEW TAXES
TRADE LIBERALISATION
SHODDY PRODUCTS
DIVESTITURE
ROCK BOTTOM PRICES
PRIVATISATION
EDUCATIONAL REFORMS
RETRAINING
SEMINARS WORKSHOPS
DOWNSIZING
ELECTIONS
DUBIOUS
FOREIGN CONSULTANTS
DEVALUATION
NEO-COLONIALISM
FOLLOW-UP CONSULTANCY

Ato de Graft-Johnson is a Ghanaian illustrator who teaches at the College of Art in Kumasi.

A cocoa farmer in Cadbury's court

'WHAT is a cocoa farmer who has never been out of his country before doing in the United Kingdom?' A reasonable enough question, you might think – but the imperious manner of a large, red-faced immigration officer gives it a fully-intended, intimidating weight. Asamoah stands, looking very small and uncertain, in his only suit. It is six in the morning at Gatwick Airport, south of London. No-one is in a good mood. Trouble is in the air.

I have already passed through immigration and go back to see if I can help. It doesn't make much difference. The immigration officer is incredulous: 'What is a Canadian' – he says the word like it was some kind of social disease – 'doing helping a cocoa farmer from Ghana get into the United Kingdom?' It is not just a question of Asamoah's skin colour but also of his style. He lacks the self-assurance of the globalized robots who run the world economy and pass through immigration like it's a subway turnstile. Authority smells a lack of confidence like a Rottweiler smells fear.

Asamoah visits the 'real world' – where they trade cocoa that doesn't exist, and chocolate comes shaped like dinosaurs.

I try to explain why we want Asamoah to see how chocolate is made and consumed. But Blimp of Immigration is dubious: 'So, the big chocolate companies know about this do they?' Got me there. I mutter the names of some chocolate people we are to meet and some fair-traded brands. 'Never seen any of those in the store,' Blimp shoots back.

Eventually the fact that Asamoah already has his visa gets us through. But this is obviously an unusual and unwelcome state of affairs. It is okay for Asamoah's cocoa beans to travel to Britain, but he is expected to stay home. It is one of the central ironies of the global economy – freedom for commodities but not people.

The reason for Asamoah's trip is simple enough – we want his reactions to the chocolate economy, with all the contrived luxury but real power that underpins it. It's a long way from Camp Number One to Britain, and not just in distance. Asamoah is overwhelmed. After a few days he proclaims: 'It will take Ghana 100 years to catch up.' He is bursting with questions: 'Why are there no people selling goods along the highway?' Or, after recovering

Once in the UK Asamoah finds it hard to believe that cocoa beans can end up as chocolate dinosaurs.

Thorntons
TYRANNOSAURUS REX
MILK CHOCOLATE DINOSAUR

Chocolate capitalism

How the avuncular image of the chocolate business has melted into the giant corporations that dominate the trade today.

The origins of the giant chocolate companies that now hold a monopoly position in the global confectionery market are an interesting departure from the usual ruthless capital accumulation practised by the robber barons of the nineteenth century. These companies have their roots in the dissenting religious traditions that influenced the social-gospel wing of Anglo-Protestantism. British firms like Frys, Rowntree and Cadbury were all started with the money of Quaker families. In the US, Milton Hershey (1857-1945) was of Mennonite stock and known as 'the Henry Ford of Chocolate'. He had his roots in the 'Pennsylvania Dutch' country in the southeastern part of the state. The company was headquartered in the town of Hershey, literally built by chocolate, with streetlights shaped like 'Hershey's Kisses' and the main thoroughfares named Cocoa and Chocolate Avenues. A twin sugar-refining town was established in Hershey, Cuba.

Part of the inspiration for these companies came from prohibition sentiments. Chocolate was seen as a benign substitute for alcohol – the one a sin, the other merely a minor vice. All these firms developed elaborate schemes for the spiritual and physical uplift for their workers. Trusts established by Cadbury and Rowntree channeled some of the ample profits into worthwhile social causes. These companies often provided good housing and prided themselves on the recreational and educational opportunities they made available to workers. The handsome Birmingham suburb of Bourneville was established by Cadbury at a time when accommodation for many industrial workers was in the slums of East London or the Lower-East Side of New York City. Of course, such ventures were not entirely altruistic, as they ensured the loyalty and reliability of the workforce, extended company control over more aspects of workers' lives and acted as a bulwark against militant unionism. In Hershey, Pennsylvania, the company ran virtually everything, from the local government to the town library.

Today, only tattered traces of the old paternal relationship remain. The chocolate industry, like so many others, has been reshaped by globalization and downsizing. In most cases the family firm is a thing of the past. Technology has taken its toll. At Cadbury's Bourneville facility employment peaked at about 25,000 during World War Two, but today it is closer to 5,000 – although a Cadbury employee about to be married still receives a bible and a carnation. Indeed, except for the smaller specialty firms and a very few 'majors', it is no longer possible to speak of a separate chocolate industry at all. This is particularly true in the cocoa-grinding industry, where major players include the US wholesale food-processing giants, Cargill and ADM. The infamous Swiss giant, Nestlé – the world leader in chocolate production, after swallowing Rowntree, Frys and many others – is into so many other aspects of the food industry that it now bills itself as 'The Food Company'. The US tobacco giant, Philip Morris, is also a major player in the industry, with total sales behind only Nestlé and Mars. Many of these majors are now expanding into the Asian and Eastern European markets, either building new factories or, more likely, buying up local companies.

The sum of these changes adds up to an industry that behaves much like any other. Whether the issue is truth in advertising, the integrity of ingredients, the treatment of workers, or the source and price of cocoa – the bottom line rules. Today, market share is the name of the game. Vast amounts of money are pumped into advertising to establish name recognition. Although demand continues to grow at two-to-three per cent a year, dramatic shifts in market share are unlikely, except where competitors can be bought out. So improving the bottom line is dependent on reducing the costs of labour and raw materials. One of the most expensive of the raw materials in chocolate is still cocoa. So the price of the bean must be kept low, or the amount of cocoa used in chocolate reduced. Given this shift to business-as-usual capitalism, it is not unfair to shed the illusions of Mr Willie Wonka and no longer think about the chocolate industry as a benevolent uncle. After all, if we can have Big Oil, why not Big Chocolate?

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from the first shock of seeing so many white beggars: 'Why don't their families look after them?' The questions come quicker than the answers.

We start with a meeting in the London offices of Twin Trading, who facilitate the purchase of Kuapa cocoa to make European fair-traded chocolate. The 'chocolate man' at Twin is Simon Wright, who became disillusioned with the mainstream industry – one of his jobs as a food technologist was to try to reduce the already small amount of cocoa solids in the British product. He now splits his time between Twin Trading and Green and Black's, who sell Maya Gold, the only fair-traded chocolate produced exclusively for the English market. Simon traces for Asamoah the route that Kuapa cocoa takes to market – through the Dutch port of Rotterdam to be processed by Dutch Cocoa into cocoa liquor, butter or powder. This premium cocoa is a key ingredient of quality European chocolate. The fair-traded part of Kuapa's cocoa becomes Swiss or German chocolate – fair-traded cocoa butter is used by the Body Shop as a base for cosmetics.

Neither Simon, nor any of the other folk around the room, believe that much Ghanaian cocoa makes it onto the huge British market. The best cocoa fetches a premium price that only high-grade chocolate manufacturers are willing to pay. Most British factories are not even set up to make high-grade chocolate – in fact, very little of it gets produced anywhere in the English-speaking world. The growing chocolate monopolies (Big Chocolate) dominate in the British (Cadbury, Mars and Nestlé), US (Hershey, Mars and Nestlé), Australian (Nestlé and Cadbury) and Canadian (where Cadbury recently bought out Neilson) markets. These firms' bread-and-butter is a low-cost, heavily-advertised candy designed to gain high market share. The average cocoa content is in the 20-per-cent range – quality chocolate comes closer to 40 or 50 per cent, or even more.

Low cocoa solids means less money for the farmer. A rough back-of-the-envelope calculation, based on the current cocoa price of about £1,100 a ton, shows that if Asamoah's cocoa were used in the leading 200-gram milk-chocolate bar in Britain he could expect just 0.5p from the 90p retail price.

Simon gives Asamoah and me a lecture on the peculiarities of the English taste bud. 'Historically, the English have not wanted their chocolate to taste much like chocolate. Indeed, they haven't gone for any strong flavours at all. When you bite into most English commercial chocolate the first sensation is a sweetish toffee kind of taste.'

He sees hope in the renewed interest in food sweeping the Anglo-Saxon world. If the fair-trade movement produces a high-quality chocolate using lots of cocoa with few chemical inputs and returning a decent price to the farmer – it just might catch on. The product would appeal on grounds of quality and health, as well as fairness. Twin's big success story is CaféDirect, their widely-distributed, fair-traded, ground coffee. At the moment they play mostly a facilitating role in the trade of cocoa. Most fair-traded chocolate is manufactured, and mostly consumed, on the continent. A trickle makes it onto the shelves of fair-trade shops associated with organizations like Oxfam. But fair-traded chocolate is more complicated and expensive to produce than simply bagging and selling coffee. It has proved hard to break the stranglehold of Big Chocolate, which keeps the price low and saturates the media with advertising. Simon points out that fair trade has to be more expensive – more for raw materials, more expensive batch runs in smaller factories. But a large and lucrative chocolate market means gaining even a small niche could mean lots of money and cocoa.

When the topic shifts to the use of vegetable fats to cheapen production costs – and biotechnology research either to cheapen further or even replace cocoa altogether – I sense Asamoah's unease. 'Do you think the flavour would be the same as cocoa?' he ventures. I say I can't

PHOTOS BY RICHARD SWIFT

imagine that it would. A look of worry passes across his face and there is no answer to his query: 'What would you do with cocoa then?'

Our next stop after Twin is the trading floor of the London Futures Market. Here Asamoah is surprised to discover that, in a place devoted to buying and selling cocoa, there is not a bean in sight. The level of abstraction involved with futures trading is hard for both of us to grasp. The scene is like something out of the movie *Wall Street*, although the nice fellows from the Cocoa Association who are showing us around are poor stand-ins for Michael Douglas. The screaming, wildly gesticulating traders in the pit seem to Asamoah like 'a group of madmen in an asylum'. Their purpose is mysterious and obscure. Our guides are at great pains to explain to us the underlying rationality of the trading system, despite its myriad complexity. The purpose of the market, they say, is to 'hedge' against unexpected price increases in the future – understandable enough, when prices can range between £3,000 and £500 per ton in the space of just a few years.

So far so good. But only two-to-three per cent of these 'futures' contracts ever end up in the physical delivery of cocoa. Indeed, seven or eight times – even higher in New York, the home of speculation – more cocoa is bought and sold on the exchange *than exists or ever will exist*. This sounds to me like speculation, no matter who is doing it. Most deals for the physical delivery of beans are done by fax or telephone between the players in the industry and by-pass the exchange entirely. Yet the exchange remains crucial in setting price. It is plain that a lot of people do very well out of these futures markets – just having a 'seat' in the cocoa 'pit' could set you back £30,000. The fleeting suspicion that this speculation – or 'non-speculation', if you want – is on the backs of hard-pressed growers, without whom the whole edifice would crumble, is surely forgivable. If cocoa trading generates so much profit, why should it be so hard for Asamoah to get enough from his crop to pay the school fees for his youngest son in Kumasi? More sane ways of balancing supply and demand are not popular in a market-mad era, with its demands to 'liberalize' everything.

Chocolate wars

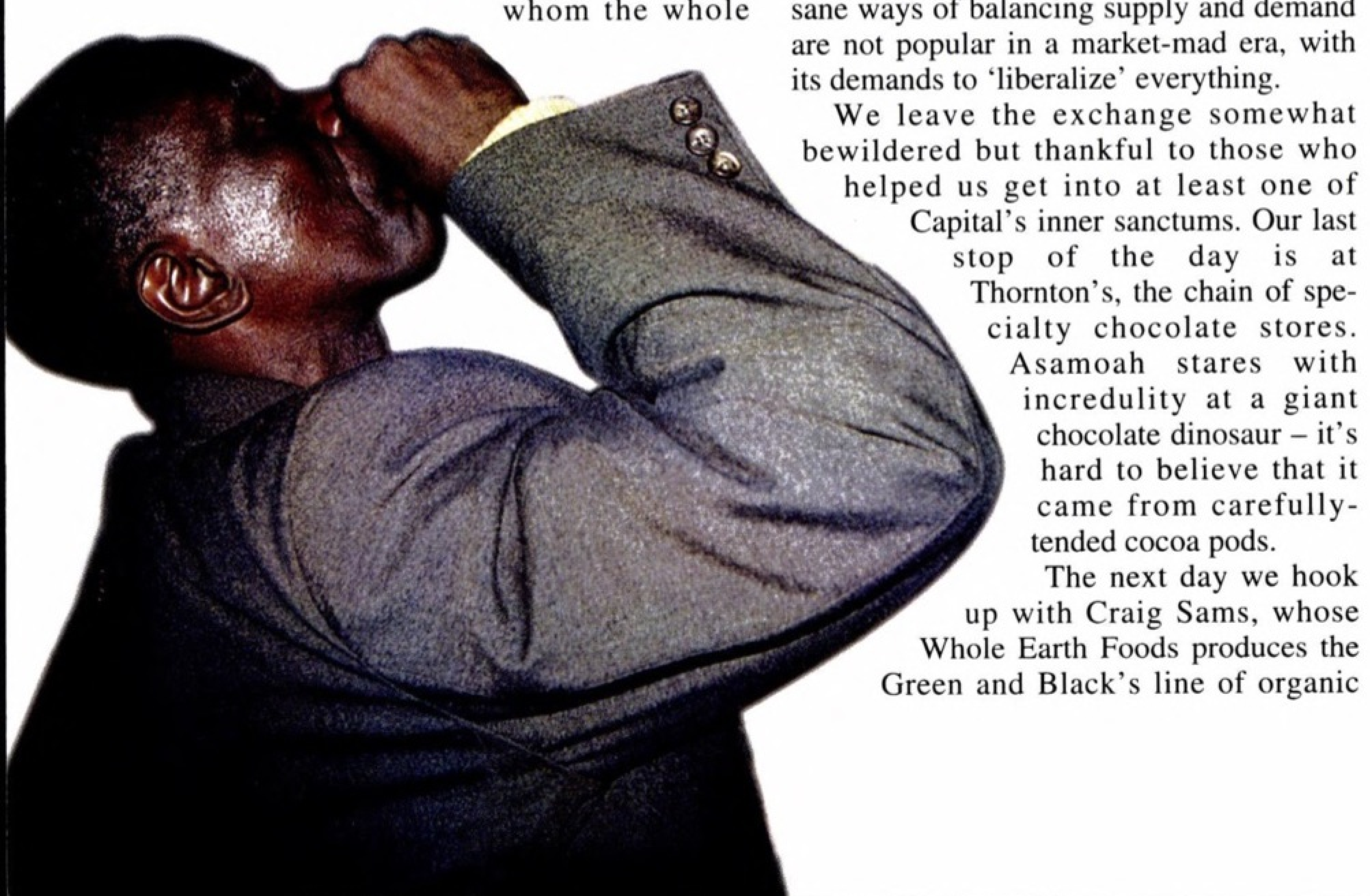
Big Chocolate wants to make bars with even less cocoa in them – but not everyone thinks this is a good idea.

What exactly is chocolate? Seems obvious enough on the surface. But what you see when you buy that candy bar may not be exactly what you end up with in your stomach. The exact ingredients that go into 'chocolate' vary a lot, depending on who made the product, which country you purchased it in and what you paid for it.

Today an unlikely battle is raging across Europe pitting those with a more craft-like approach to chocolate manufacture – the French, the Swiss and particularly the Belgians – against the more industrial approach of the British, the Irish, the Portuguese and most Scandinavians. At issue is how much or how little cocoa you can use and still call it chocolate. Most countries, including the US and Russia, do not permit chocolate products to contain cheap vegetable fats which reduce cocoa-butter content and often the dairy component in milk chocolate. In the name of market harmonization there is a push to change this rule and allow the current British regulation of up to five per cent vegetable-oil content – overthrowing a current European Union edict which prohibits vegetable fats. Big Chocolate is lining up on the British side so it can produce an ever-cheaper low-cocoa candy bar. This issue is currently stalemated.

The arguments in favour of vegetable oil have to do with variety, quality, and shelf life. However, most of these are marginal factors and the real issue is cost. Although it doesn't sound like much – not enough to pass on to consumers – the five per cent could mean millions of dollars extra on the bottom line for industrial chocolate producers. It will also mean reduced cocoa sales for farmers like Asamoah and reduced income from foreign exchange for poor West African countries. There are some 11 million people in West Africa directly dependent on cocoa for their livelihoods. A loss of foreign exchange is likely to exacerbate the effects of structural adjustment, making things like school and health fees higher for a population that is already poorly served. Estimates of the loss in markets vary from a low of 88,450 tons to a high of 200,000 tons, depending on the average percentage of vegetable fats used and how many countries change their regulations. Reduced demand is also likely to be a factor in pushing down cocoa prices.

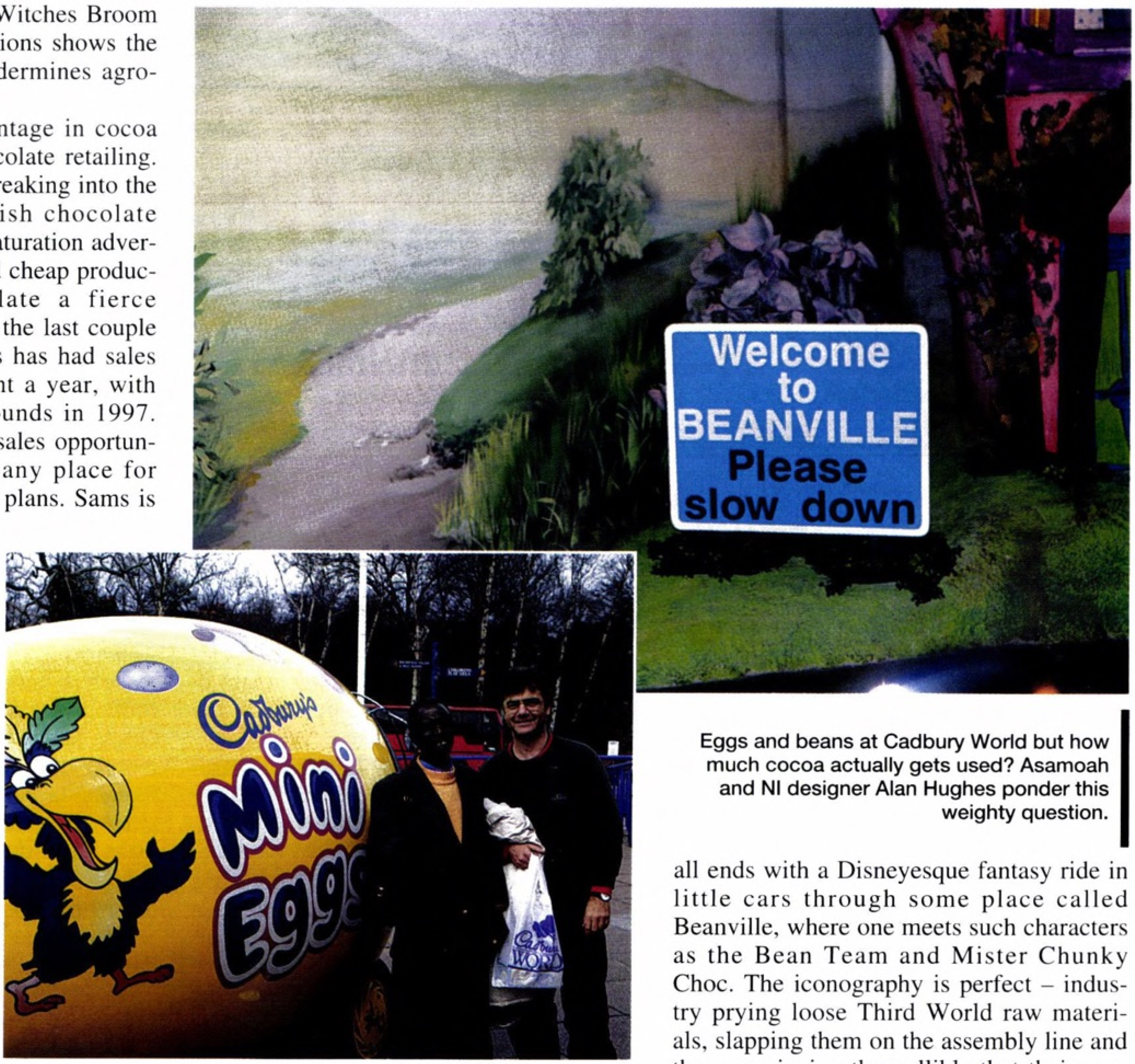
Opposition to the change comes not only from producer countries but from a wide range of affected groups, including the cocoa-processing industry, dock workers, the dairy industry and fair-trade associations. Some consumer groups are also concerned not only with accuracy in labelling but with the health effects of replacing a saturated fat like cocoa butter with more harmful hardened or hydrogenated fats. This opposition does not seek to prevent the manufacture of these vegetable-oil candies, but simply to have them called something else. They quite logically point out that when vegetable oil is used to make soya spread or margarine it is no longer called butter. Why should it be different for chocolate? The position of the Fair Trade Movement is that 'for the well-being of the Southern cocoa producers and the rights of the European Union consumer, it is imperative to harmonize the market at zero per cent vegetable fats. The denomination 'chocolate' must be strictly reserved for cocoa-based products not containing vegetable fats other than cocoa butter.' The name being proposed instead of chocolate for the vegetable oil candies is 'vegelate'. A bar of pure dairy vegelate anyone?



We leave the exchange somewhat bewildered but thankful to those who helped us get into at least one of Capital's inner sanctums. Our last stop of the day is at Thornton's, the chain of specialty chocolate stores. Asamoah stares with incredulity at a giant chocolate dinosaur – it's hard to believe that it came from carefully-tended cocoa pods.

The next day we hook up with Craig Sams, whose Whole Earth Foods produces the Green and Black's line of organic chocolate. Fair-traded Maya Gold is made with cocoa from a co-operative in Belize. Sams has a broad vision of the political economy of food, and a special interest in cocoa and chocolate. He sees the richness, flavour and individuality of good chocolate as tied to the unique care small farmers give to the variety of their trees and beans. He is certain this will never be replicated in the uniformity of plantation agriculture: 'Nothing in the world has such a complexity of flavours. There are over 400 distinct smells that come from the cocoa bean – the rose has only fourteen and the onion just six or seven.' Sams finds it distressing that cocoa is the world's most heavily sprayed food crop. But he believes that the small farmer is ultimately the most efficient producer of beans. 'Plantations can only compete if they are run under conditions of near slave labour, with extremely low wages – and people will only put up with that for so long.' The dramatic drop in the share of cocoa production from Brazilian and Malaysian plantations support Sams' argument. An epidemic of Witches Broom disease on Brazilian plantations shows the way genetic uniformity undermines agrochemical crops.

But if small is an advantage in cocoa production, it is not in chocolate retailing. Sams has had a hard time breaking into the multi-billion-pound British chocolate market. A combination of saturation advertising, clout with buyers and cheap production makes Big Chocolate a fierce competitor. Nonetheless, in the last couple of years Green and Black's has had sales growth of 20 to 30 per cent a year, with sales topping a million pounds in 1997. Asamoah is quick to see a sales opportunity and asks if Sams has any place for Kuapa's beans in his future plans. Sams is plainly sympathetic but would require Kuapa's beans to be certified organic. Asamoah ponders this possibility. Later, when we tour some organic West End shops that sell Maya Gold and a range of organic fair-traded chocolate, Asamoah becomes increasingly intrigued with the idea of Kuapa 'going organic'. He, like so many other Ghanaian farmers, has already cut down on chemical pesticides because of expense. It might be trickier to convince Kuapa members to cut out the cheaper, less toxic fungicides used against the devastating Black Pod disease. But Asamoah is beginning to think this is the wave of the future: 'I think that everything that we sell should be organic. Otherwise we will be left behind and not able to sell our cocoa.'



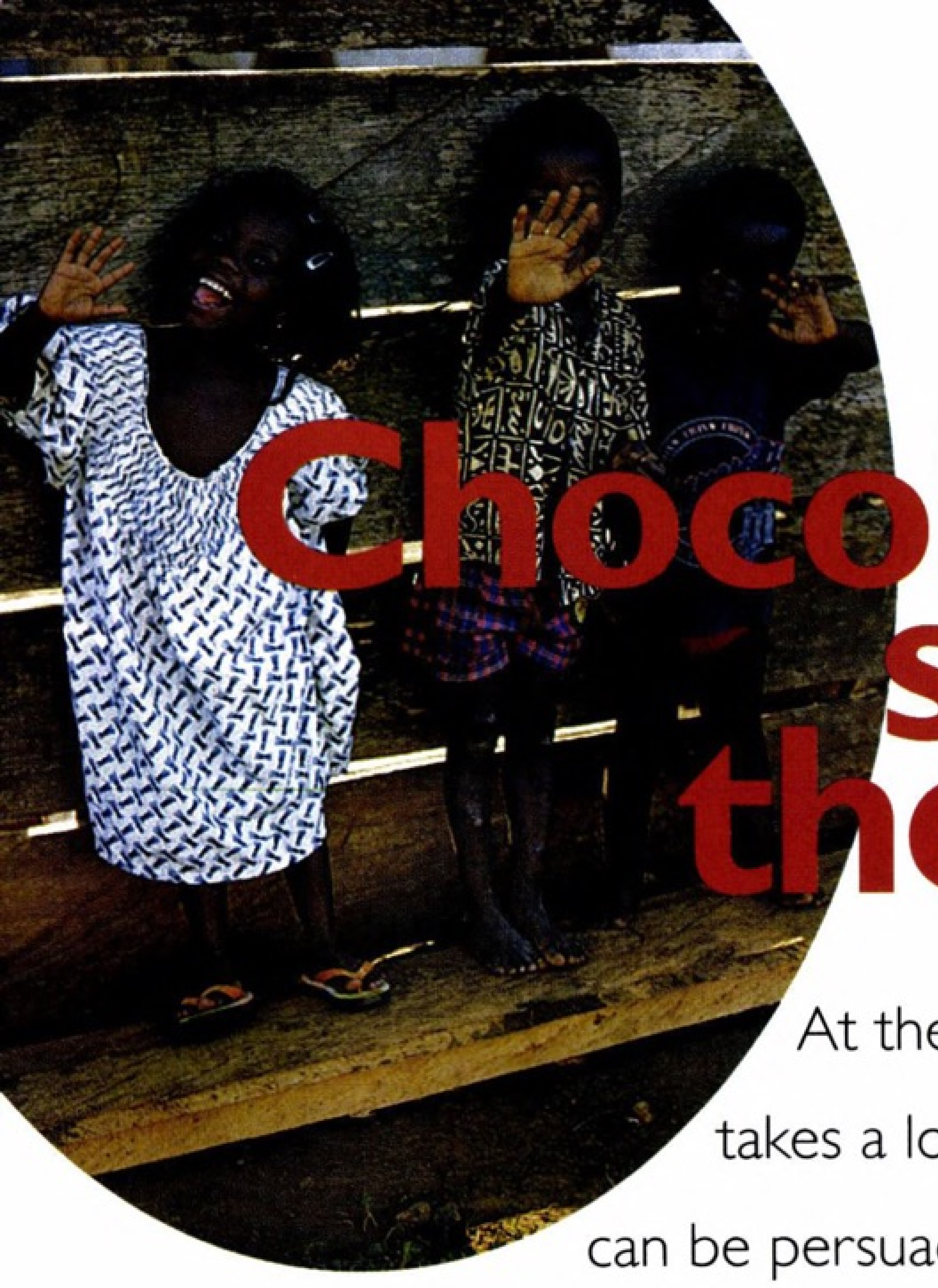
Eggs and beans at Cadbury World but how much cocoa actually gets used? Asamoah and NI designer Alan Hughes ponder this weighty question.

We end our whirlwind tour of the world of chocolate with a visit to the Birmingham suburb of Bournville, the home of Cadbury – the only remaining English-owned player in the Big Chocolate game. Most chocolate companies – most food companies, for that matter – do not like groups of nosey customers wandering around factories. We have been refused outright by the good folk at Mars, who didn't want Asamoah to see how they made Mars Bars in Slough. Perhaps they were afraid of a candid photo catching a production worker picking their nose. Some companies, like Hershey in the US and Cadbury, have set up theme parks outside their factories. The parks combine elements of the production process with a magical chocolate world, where fantasy and history intersect in one glorious burst of self-promotion. We enter 'Cadbury World'.

The overwhelming impression Asamoah gains is of sheer scale: one 12-hour-shift packs 345,000 bars; 800 bars a minute; 12,000 tons a week. Despite chocolate's reputation as a luxurious food, for Big Chocolate it is, first and foremost, an industrial product. Although many of the operations in Cadbury World are still done by hand, in the real plant everything is automated. The idea is to give the customer the sense that Big Chocolate still regards chocolate-making as a craft, carried out under 'the watchful eyes of our most experienced chocolateers', who never tire of chocolate: 'They are chocoholics. Chocolate is a way of life.' Some of the chocolateers look kind of bored this Thursday morning. Asamoah feels he would rather work under his trees than on the line for Cadbury. He introduces himself to one young worker and asks about the use of Ghanaian cocoa. The worker says that, while he isn't entirely certain, he thinks most of the cocoa comes from plantations in Malaysia.

The basic structure of Cadbury World takes the customer through a sanitized history of cocoa – no slaves here – to a 'craft-like' sample of chocolate-making, then a revealing survey of advertising around the world and over the decades. It all ends with a Disneyesque fantasy ride in little cars through some place called Beanville, where one meets such characters as the Bean Team and Mister Chunky Choc. The iconography is perfect – industry prying loose Third World raw materials, slapping them on the assembly line and then convincing the gullible that their purchase is a magic route to a fantasy happiness. In Spain the ads run to flamenco guitar; happy Indians dance in the rain; in the US it is cutesy mini-egg bunnies. Back in the 1960s they jitterbugged for Cadbury and there was always that great underlying theme: 'I like a man who likes me enough to buy me...' Images of old George Cadbury's first store combine with a futuristic space scene where all the planets are candy-covered chocolates. One leaves with the impression that Cadbury is here, then, now and forever – and there is, naturally enough, a buying opportunity. Ten check-out lanes are clogged with happy Cadbury Worlders taking home the goodies.

For Asamoah, amazement is clearly the main reaction. It is a long way down the cocoa chain from his eight acres up in the hills above Camp Number One. The concerns of Big Chocolate to cut costs while increasing market-share are a universe away from the struggle of West African farmers for a minimal well-being based on a decent price for their beans. Still, that day in Birmingham, Asamoah clearly felt a certain pride that he was a part of this strange enterprise called the chocolate economy. ■



Chocolate saves the world!

At the end of the trail **Richard Swift** takes a look at the magic bean to see if it can be persuaded to work better for everyone.

The ironies that surround the cocoa chain are legion. Kids in cocoa villages never taste chocolate. Cocoa farmers – as British immigration made plain to Asamoah – are not meant to travel the route of their beans. In the cocoa markets of London and New York there is no cocoa to be seen and most of what is traded is fictional. The pleasure of eating chocolate is accompanied by obsessions with fat, body-image, binge-eating, pimples and general low-level guilt. Perhaps most poignantly of all, Big Chocolate wants to reduce still further the presence of the magic bean in its product. Chocolate without chocolate.

All such ironies are shaped or misshapen by the market. But there are markets – and then there are markets. In the vast Kumasi market, where Asamoah's daughter Gloria sells her tomatoes and onions, you can buy almost anything, but no chocolate or even cocoa beans. These markets are quite different from the long-distance export market that trades cocoa before the pods even sprout from the trees. A drought may shift prices dramatically, but ultimately it is projections of demand and supply by Big Chocolate, using all the paraphernalia of modern research technology and commercial calculation, that decide price. It's a contest of unequals, with the end buyer and seller barely even aware of each other's existence. The difference in life-experience between a dealer on the New York Commodity Exchange with a six-figure salary, and someone who owns a small cocoa farm in West Africa, is too vast even to contemplate. Yet gaining competitive position for one may put the very survival of the other into question.

African markets are not like this. Here people look each other in the eye, discuss the quality of the goods, what is fair and what each party can afford. If the product doesn't meet up to expectations the buyer can return to complain directly. If the seller thinks the price offered is just too low there are usually other customers willing to pay a more reasonable price. Prices more or less fit the needs of human survival. There is an honesty and an equality here. So when next you hear the 'free market' being lionized, make sure to inquire which market the speaker has in mind.

Serious efforts are being made to introduce fairness into international trade. These are closely tied to the production of high-quality chocolate. Farmers' co-ops like Kuapa, fair-traders like Twin and fair-trade producers like Gepa, Coopéración, Green and Black's and a number of others – mostly in continental Europe – are leading the way. In Canada and the US you can get Masaco chocolate from Bolivian cocoa, in Australia it's Force 10 from Samoan cocoa and Trade Aid chocolate in Aotearoa. But a better price for cocoa remains far down the priority list of Big Chocolate, where trends are the same as those throughout the global corporate economy: merger mania, restructuring to reduce costs, and the battle for market share, mostly through the promotion of heavily-advertized, low-cocoa-content chocolate bars and candies.

Building an alternative unites the battle for fairness with that for a high-quality – often more healthy and organic – product. As Craig Sams from Green and Black's points out, it doesn't take much of a price-break to improve things for the small farmer: 'We screw people to the wall for so little. By giving a 25-per-cent premium to growers, Green and Black's add only four per cent to the cost of each bar, but for the farmers that makes a huge difference.'

One way of giving a leg-up to fair-traded goods would be by reducing the sales tax on them. But in an era that glorifies the unfettered market this is bound to be greeted with screams of 'unfair subsidy'. Yet, for example, agricultural subsidies in Europe are estimated to add nearly $36 to the average family food bill *every week*. And, in the era of supposed free trade, Ghana's excellent chocolate would meet a 34 per cent tariff if it ever reached a European port.

Things may not be all bleak for small cocoa producers. This spring, speculation emerged on the front page of the lofty *New York Times*, in a piece entitled 'Chocoholics Take Note: Beloved Bean in Peril' about a bean shortage in the next five-to-ten years. The speculation may be exaggerated, but if it leads to a better price for Asamoah's beans, so much the better. More interesting was the analysis of a convergence of interest between some chocolate producers, environmentalists and small farmers. There is an emerging consensus that the small farm is the best way to produce cocoa as well as to preserve biodiversity.

All is not rosy for small farmers. The shifting pattern of cocoa production across Ghana has moved from east to west as soil fertility declines and trees age. Even small farmers face problems unless the best of grassroots science – integrated pest management, new ideas in inter-cropping, soil science – is made available to them. Who will there be to do this if structural-adjustment policies cut agricultural outreach services to the bone, as they have done in Ghana?

If small farmers are to be the wave of the future they must do better out of a chocolate bar. Big Chocolate won't jump on its own – pressure is needed. On the political side, some of this is beginning to come from the 'Cocoa Platforms': alliances of unions, producers, fair-traders, environmentalists and other activists in the industry in Europe, Brazil and Ghana. Economic pressure must also come from those who produce a higher-quality, cocoa-intensive product. If dissatisfaction grows with the cocoa-poor, sugar-heavy candy that Big Chocolate passes off on a public unaware of alternatives, the market niche for better-quality chocolate will expand. Even a small drop in market share is something big companies cannot afford to ignore. So, as the political hucksters are fond of saying, this is a 'win-win scenario'; good for farmers, good for consumers, good for the ecosystem. So don't feel guilty – buy fair traded and have another bite. ■

Market day in Sankare; African markets have a different ethos to those of corporate capitalism.

The **NI** Interview

Hazel Henderson

Murray MacAdam tracks down one of the world's most cogent 'anti-economists'.

Tall, tanned and debonair, Hazel Henderson is an unlikely revolutionary. She greets me with a warm smile and orders a pot of tea, looking not unlike the well-heeled matrons staying at this comfortable hotel. Once she starts talking, however, this image quickly fades. Society matrons generally don't start conversations by thrusting a book on reforming the United Nations into your hands.

But reforming the United Nations is just one of Hazel Henderson's many passions. This influential 'futurist' and sustainable-development advocate has attracted an enthusiastic following for her penetrating critique of conventional economics combined with imaginative strategies for human-based development.

'I started in the mid-1960s with Citizens for Clean Air,' she says. She was living in New York then and launched the group because she was worried about the impact of pollution on her son. Now over 60, she quips that she is now doing it for her seven-year-old grandson. 'When he talks of endangered species, I say to myself: "My God, what are we leaving them? What on earth are we doing?"'

Probing the causes of New York's dirty air led Henderson to investigate the links between the economy and pollution. Though her fledgling group attracted 20,000 members in a few weeks, she wasn't getting much respect from those in power. 'She's a nice lady,' was the common response. 'But she doesn't understand the economy.'

That steeled her resolve. She went to work mastering market economics and became a razor-sharp critic in the process.

'Economics is not a science,' Henderson says firmly. 'It's a profession.' She calls herself an 'anti-economist' and attacks the 'brain damage' caused by conventional economic thinking. Cautiously sipping her tea, Henderson warms quickly to one of her favourite topics: how growth-fixated economics wreaks havoc on the environment and on local communities. 'The one-size-fits-all IMF model ignores the individual characteristics of national economies,' she explains. 'Why, for example, were there such big economic differences between China and the old Soviet Union, even though both were Communist nations?'

Henderson charges that standard economics is fatally flawed because it ignores the economic value of Mother Nature. Decrying the short-term concern with growth, she adds reflectively: 'It doesn't take a genius to pump up the GNP by burning down rainforests, using slave labour and social repression to keep things in place.'

Henderson also charges that mainstream economists focus too much on the private sector while downplaying the public sector and totally ignoring what she calls the 'love economy' – volunteering, barter and other self-help efforts.

'This stuff has been missing from the GNP, yet it's about half of all economic activity,' she notes. 'It was even more important before we decided to make economics our religion and Mammon our God.'

Even more perverse, says Henderson, is that this destructive economic model distorts our understanding of each other. 'Fifty per cent of human nature is caring and sharing and fifty per cent is competitive,' she stresses. 'You need both. Competition is great. But when you reward only the competitors, you get into serious trouble.'

Despite her anger with conventional economic thinking, Henderson is passionate in her conviction that ordinary citizens, forward-thinking political leaders and savvy companies can turn things around. She's a keen advocate of socially responsible investing. Even though, as she notes with a chuckle, 'a lot of people think that if you get involved in capitalist enterprises, it means you've sold out'.

Henderson reaches a wide audience with her books and speeches and through a worldwide syndicated newspaper column. Yet at home in the US it's tough for her to get a hearing. That fits her critique of 'mediocracy', a term Henderson coined to describe the shallow, mass-media culture which shapes not just our private lives, but also our politics.

'We're so dumbed down in the US,' she sighs. 'The media don't want to discuss anything controversial.' As an alternative she is now involved in a new TV network focusing on global poverty and development. Henderson glows with delight as she hands me a folder describing the new initiative.

'We need our own TV network where grassroots groups can tell their stories, where people can tune in to each other,' she insists. Henderson was the first private investor in this network and is now trying to attract other like-minded investors.

A group of smokers at the next table sends us scurrying to a smoke-free refuge nearby. After a pause she reflects on the gains she's seen in more than three decades of work.

'When I started, the word "pollution" was unknown. In 1964 there were no departments of environmental protection, no environmental laws, nothing. There have been immense changes. People aren't stupid. They realize we're part of the environment. If it's destroyed and if our communities are destroyed by things like homelessness, there will be no future.'

The interview is drawing to a close. We've already talked longer than planned and Henderson has to rush off to prepare for an evening lecture. But not quite yet.

There is still one last idea she wants to tell me about. She calls it the UN Security Insurance Agency. It would be a mechanism for helping small nations cut bloated military budgets. And it would free up scarce resources for more socially pressing needs. Countries that prove they've cut military expenditures would pay insurance premiums to a special UN agency and in return be guaranteed security through a Rapid Deployment Force. Support for citizen groups that promote tolerance would make up the front line of defence. She snaps her briefcase shut and rises to go. 'Bosnia has shown that if you don't fund civil-society groups, you can never pull the soldiers out.' ■

Murray MacAdam is a journalist and NGO worker.

Reviews

music

Rafi's Revenge

by **Asian Dub Foundation**
(London/FFrr 556 006-2CD)

Ghostland

by **Ghostland**
(East West 3984200502 CD)

These two very different releases show that 'hybrid' music is evidence of a fast-moving and developing culture. Just picking out the influences that colour the rampaging multi-rhythms of Asian Dub Foundation's first major label release, **Rafi's Revenge**, can be fun. There's traditional Indian music (in fact, some of their guitars are tuned to Indian scales) and Bollywood tunes; Bob Marley, Jamaican reggae and rap, as filtered through a punked-up aesthetic that owes more to the Sex Pistols or the Clash than anything out of Brooklyn.

And then, of course, there's the political element with songs like 'Naxalite', about a 1968 peasant uprising in West Bengal, 'Assassin', dedicated to Udam Singh, who killed former Punjab Governor General O'Dwyer in revenge for the Amritsar massacre, and 'Free Satpal Ram', a fierce campaigning song centred upon a victim of rough justice. Asian Dub Foundation can sound rough and ready in parts, but the energy of **Rafi's Revenge** is as undeniable as it is infectious. 'Building this community of sound / Celebrating the unity we have found', to take one lyric, says much of the band's desire to mix pop and politics into a force for change. Brought together by a community music project in East London, the five-strong ADF – who utilize DJ turntables, guitars and raps to realize their music – were by nature and location, politicized even before the band kicked off. Growing up with the continual cloud of anti-Asian violence that hangs over the East End, they pooled their talents to produce a music that pulls no punches in its messages.

Politics ☆☆☆☆
Entertainment ☆☆☆☆

Quite different is the delicate music of **Ghostland**, a London-based trio whose debut album features guest appearances from Sinéad O'Connor (last sighted as the Virgin Mary in Neil Jordan's film, *The Butcher Boy*) and Natasha Atlas, a young Jewish woman from London who has a fantastic line in Arabic-styled singing. Although guitarist Justin Adams, producer and instrumentalist John Reynolds and cellist Caroline Dale come from disparate backgrounds, they have sought a way to draw out similarities and tensions between their methods and influences. The results are nothing short of mesmerizing. Reynolds, who realized from his work with Jah Wobble, O'Connor and Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan that Irish and Arabic scales have much in common, has teased out the consistencies with consummate ease. There are, with notable exceptions, few vocals. O'Connor makes the prayer-like simplicity of 'Guide me God' quite awesome, while the guitars provide an unobtrusive underpinning. The most telling lines come from Caroline Dale's cello which plays out its own dramas, taking the listener from Blues-soaked mountain ranges to wider vistas, courtesy of some Avro Pärt-influenced lines. Ghostland may not be the first outfit to work in such ways, but they do it well. And, like Asian Dub Foundation, they present a front line where the hybrid is far from being a diminutive idea.

Politics ☆☆☆
Entertainment ☆☆☆☆ LG

books

Death of Dignity: Angola's Civil War

by **Victoria Brittain**
(Pluto, ISBN 0 7453 1252 7)

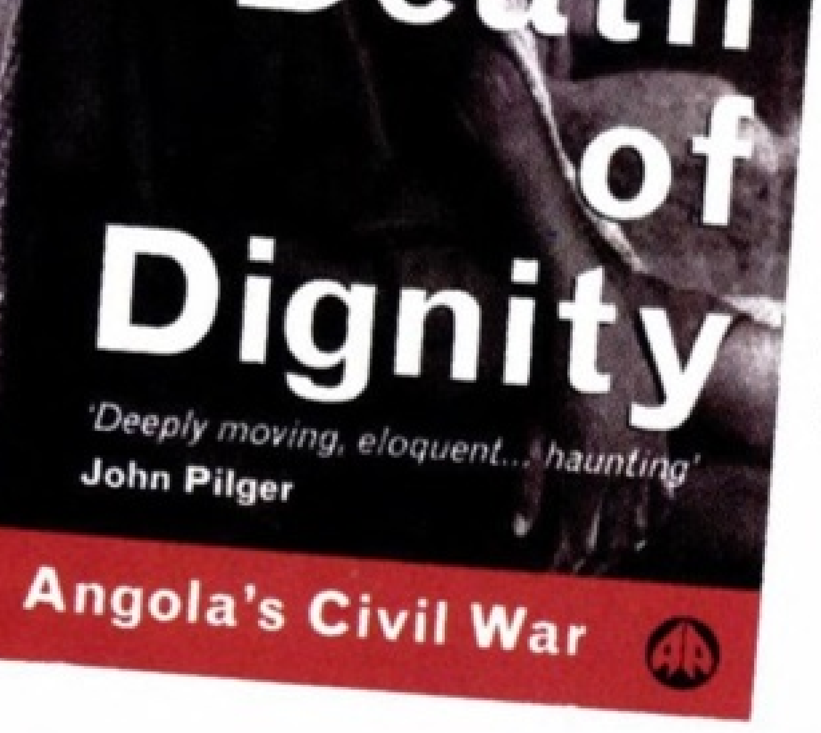
South Africa: Limits to Change

by **Hein Marais** *(Zed Books/ University of Cape Town Press, ISBN 1 85649 544 2)*

Under African Skies: Modern African Stories

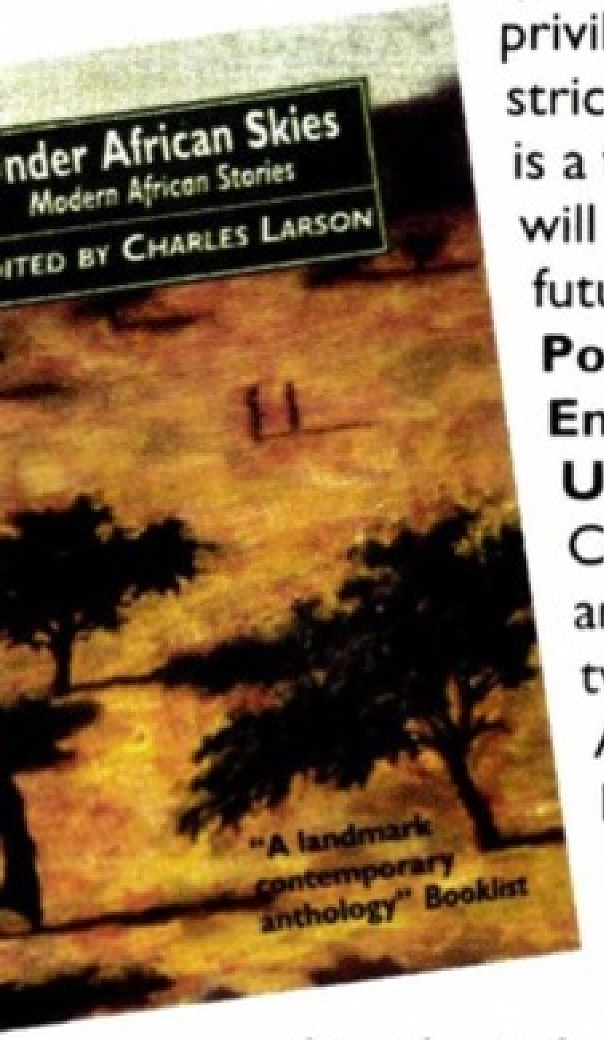
edited by **Charles Larson**
(Payback Press, ISBN 0 86241 766 X)

Victoria Brittain's short, harrowing book **Death of Dignity** charts the terrible destruction of Angola. If ever a people have deserved a chance of peace it is the Angolans. After decades of benighted rule by the Portuguese dictatorship, independence in 1975 brought only strife and civil war as the superpowers used Angolan political groups as proxies in their Cold War. In the years following independence, Ronald Reagan and the minority regime in South Africa armed their willing puppet Jonas Savimbi as his Unita organization left a trail of devastation across the country. Only the commitment of Cuban troops in battles against Unita and South African and Zairian invaders prevented Angola joining Namibia as a buffer state for apartheid. With the Soviet Union's collapse, Angola was no longer a cockpit for ideological confrontation and in September 1992, through UN supervized elections it appeared that the time for peace and rebuilding had come. But when Jose dos Santos's MPLA beat Unita at the polls, Savimbi, true to form, reneged on his promises and unleashed yet another round of civil war on this long-suffering country. Brittain's book has its flaws; I would have preferred a longer, less aridly journalistic book that placed the suffering of ordinary people at the centre of the story rather than as a backdrop to all the detail on negotiations and troop movements. It is, however, an excellent primer for anyone wanting to understand how Angola – a country with enormous potential – became, as a result of deliberate US policy, an appalling human catastrophe. It is to the continuing shame of the US and UN that millions of landmines, a devastated social infrastructure and, most of all, the continuing malign presence of Savimbi mean that there is no end in sight for the long nightmare of the Angolan people.



Politics ☆☆☆☆
Entertainment ☆☆☆

South Africa stands as proof that conflict and despair are not inevitable paths for African countries. Its recent history shows that, with courage, even the bloodiest and most intractable of regimes can be worn down and the transition to democracy can be made. But, as Hein Marais points out in his **South Africa: Limits to Change**, even with Nelson Mandela, it takes more than an election to transform the structural and economic realities of a society. It is Marais' contention that the democratic breakthrough in South Africa was much less radical than people believed and that the ANC Government's concentration on political and financial stability has meant that the needs and aspirations of the majority population have been largely unfulfilled. Marais' book is not an easy read, crammed as it is with acronyms, academic jargon and some mind-numbing Marxist gibberish, but one cannot dismiss it, as some commentators tried to dismiss John Pilger's recent documentary which made similar points, as political posturing. This is a serious book which poses a sobering question; can you effect radical change while leaving undisturbed existing privileges and inequalities? The struggle against apartheid has given way to the fight against entrenched privilege and the strictures of globalism. It is a fight whose outcome will determine all our futures.



Politics ☆☆☆☆
Entertainment ☆☆

Under African Skies, Charles Larson's anthology of twentieth-century African stories is a hugely impressive selection. In his illuminating introduction, Larson outlines how the pressures on African writers have changed over the century; colonial indifference or censorship giving way to the more insidious demands which market forces make on the creative artist. Gathered together here are representative stories from some of the best-known names in African writing – Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, Bessie Head, Ken Saro-Wiwa – and alongside them are magical pieces by powerful young writers such as Zimbabwe's Yvonne Vera and Mzamane Nhlapo from Lesotho. Standout stories include 'A Meeting in the Dark' by Ngugi wa Thiong'o and 'Taken', Steve Chimombo's resonant tale of a writer's struggle against censorship and imprisonment during the Banda regime in Malawi. Really, though, what emerges from this first-rate anthology is the ability, constantly renewed, of African writers to surmount tremendous obstacles in their efforts to find and use voices that are uniquely and unmistakably their own.

Politics ☆☆☆
Entertainment ☆☆☆☆ PW

STAR RATING

Excellent	☆☆☆☆☆
Very good	☆☆☆☆
Good	☆☆☆
Fair	☆☆
Poor	☆

THE CLASSIC

Bluebeard's Castle

...a tragedy of power and patriarchy

'I WANTED to depict a modern soul in the primary colours of folk-song,' is how Béla Balázs remembered his libretto for **Bluebeard's Castle** (1911). The result is a simmering musical volcano, a deep and thick thundercloud of condensed emotion.

Written when its composer Béla Bartók was just 30 years old, it is his only opera and, in its fluidity, untypical of his usual rugged, angular style. The action is pretty static and it has never been a stage favourite, but hour-long and with an uncomplicated storyline it is ideal to listen to at home and stage in one's mind.

Indeed such a way of receiving it may, curiously enough, be more sympathetic to its intentions, for the opera is constructed within an interior landscape. It opens with the enigmatic Duke Bluebeard letting his new bride Judith into his bare, dark castle. Promising to forsake her family and previous life for her love of him, Judith descends the stairs and the outer door is firmly shut. The castle is a murky sighing realm with dank walls. It dawns on us that we are actually inside Bluebeard's mind, a mind which is shut up and rigid and obviously suffering. Judith protests immediately that she will dry the weeping flagstones and open up the castle to the light. But Bartók gives her a frenzied singing line suggesting desperation under the optimism, and the orchestra both echoes her urgency and attempts to drown it out. Such dualisms, sinister suggestions of something lurking beyond what is being revealed, continue until the end.

EMI CLASSICS
BARTÓK
BLUEBEARD'S CASTLE
HERZOG BLAUBARTS BURG
LE CHÂTEAU DE BARBE-BLEUE
ANNE SOFIE VON OTTER
JOHN TOMLINSON
BERLINER PHILHARMONIKER
BERNARD HAITINK

The castle has seven doors which Bluebeard informs Judith must remain firmly shut. She insists they must be flung open so that light may enter and the place may breathe. She has to negotiate the opening of each door. From the first, a shaft of crimson light pierces the dark hall (accompanied by a shrill violin tremolo) and Judith discovers a torture chamber drenched in blood. The second reveals bloody weapons. The third opens to a dazzling treasury of gold and jewels, but the calm is shattered by a woodwind shriek which reveals these riches to be flecked with blood. The fourth and fifth doors reveal Bluebeard's splendid dominions, but these too are tainted.

Older commentators often offered the 'curiosity killed the cat' interpretation of these events, emphasizing that it is fit for a woman to know her place in a relationship. But everything actually suggests the opposite reading; it is Bluebeard who is the tragic figure, locked by his patriarchal role into an unyielding rigidity, maintaining power and wealth through cruelty. It is Judith who is the enlivening principle, forcing him to look beyond his self-serving facade. Having discovered his might and crimes, she is now about to force him to face his fears and sorrow.

For when the sixth door opens a pale, unearthly, unmoving lake is revealed. Superbly orchestrated rumbles course through the music at this point, as Bluebeard's entire manner alters. Abandoning his rather limited grandiose style he brokenly admits that this mysterious lake is made of tears. Forced to admit that something is fundamentally wrong with his innermost self, he comes into his own as a character at last. Clutching for certainty in an uneasily shifting soundworld he asks Judith to embrace him and the redemptive power of her love comes sharply into focus.

But there is one last door. And the negotiation that leads up to its opening is the closest this opera comes to a love duet. Once opened, three women clad in regal robes are revealed, Bluebeard's former wives, 'Hearts that I have loved and cherished!' Bluebeard starts to drape Judith in riches and she realizes that she too is doomed to become one of his idealized women, locked behind the seventh door. He can never meet her on her own terms, but will enslave her to his world view, however false and painful. Drooping under the weight of her new vestments she joins the other women. The doors slide shut and Bluebeard is left alone in his delusions and eternal darkness.

Bluebeard's Castle is a tragedy of power; it resonates across all situations where it is unjustly wrested, whether these be personal, of gender or political. It offers an insight that is finally being widely accepted – that oppressors are as much in need of liberation from themselves as the people they oppress. It is not surprising that this reshaping of a folk tale should have come from the pen of the Leftist Balázs, who would later be persecuted by Hungarian Right-wingers. As for Bartók – a man so private that none of his companions has anything revealing to say about him – this strange little tale obviously struck a chord, inspiring him to write the most emotional music he ever created. ■

Dinyar Godrej

Several recordings are available of **Bluebeard's Castle** by **Béla Bartók**.

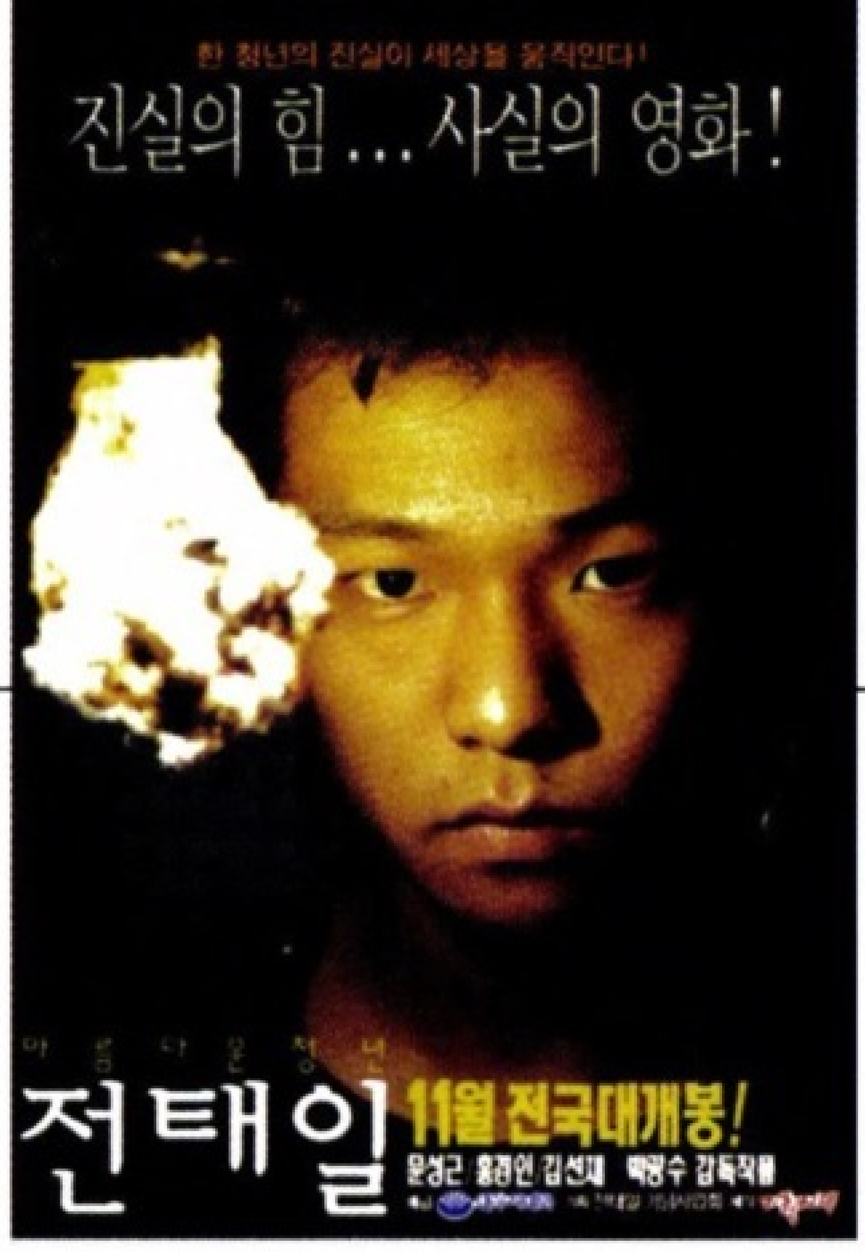
Reviews

film

A single spark

directed by **Park Kwang-Su**

(World Distribution: Fortisimo Films, Rotterdam)


한 청년의 진실이 세상을 움직인다!
진실의 힘...사실의 영화!
아름다운 청년
전태일
11월 전국대개봉!
문성근 / 홍경인 / 김선재 박광수 감독작품

After a successful run in the theatres of South Korea, a controversial film based on the country's labour struggles has taken off around the world, playing in major festivals and small theatres in Europe and North America.

Director Park Kwang-Su and his fine cast have shaped a powerful, stylish film about tragic events of the early 1970s. **A Single Spark** tells the true story of Jeon Tae-Il, a young labour activist who died in the fight to improve working conditions in Korea's garment shops.

These were tough times. As the tide shifted against South Korea's US allies in Vietnam a serious clampdown took hold. The country's ruling dictatorship, led by General Park Chung Hee since 1961, felt isolated. Student and labour opponents faced a regime desperately preaching national sacrifice in the name of its 'economic miracle'. In the words of one labour activist in the film, making change in Korea is like 'hitting a stone with a feather'. But don't worry, says an official from the Ministry of Labour to the young garment workers, 'By the 1980s you'll all be driving cars and living in luxury'.

The film strives to show that Jeon Tae-Il was not alone. Many young people, both students and workers, faced strong-arm tactics of the employers or were living underground on the run from the army. The film's central character is a journalist writing the biography of Jeon Tae-Il, who also relates his own story during the crucial year of 1975. The plot thus unfolds in a series of double flashbacks, from the present back to the writer's story in 1975, and then further back to the beginning of Jeon Tae-Il's story in 1965. Scenes from the earliest period are shot in black and white. As the film progresses the shifts between the two stories become more rapid, their two lives merging.

A Single Spark manages to walk a fine line. On the one hand it tells the story of grim events – life under the 'soft authoritarianism' of Park's regime propped up by especially nasty working conditions. Yet the lives of the young students and garment workers exude the most wonderful, naive liveliness and optimism. Their first meeting to organize the sweatshop takes place at a beach picnic complete with impromptu singing and a moonlit skinny dip.

A series of visual motifs give many scenes a polished, sophisticated feel, the film's cinematographer creating a distinctive visual style using a constantly moving, arching, and tracking camera to link characters in shifting places and times. This polished quality works well to emphasize the complex retelling of the story through flashback; it's as if the narrator has reworked the events over and over in his mind and presented them to us in their most essential form.

In the end, however, viewers will most likely retain the harsh, almost gothic images of work in the clothing sweatshops. Cotton dust hangs everywhere, like stalactites in a cave, accentuated by the bare lightbulbs dangling over rickety machines and their teenage operators. One look at those work rooms and it's clear why Jeon Tae-Il took up the fight.

Politics ☆☆☆☆☆

Entertainment ☆☆☆ PS

Reviewers: **Louise Gray, Peter Whittaker, Peter Steven**

Reviews editor: **Vanessa Baird**

The NI Crossword

No. 24 by Axe

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CRYPTIC

Across

5 Rustic Greek loses right to go to European settlement – originally in Canada's Maritime Provinces (7,6)
8 Graduate is about to go back for South American capital (6)
9 Craft caught in Easterlies – French city initially state lost off Cornwall (8)
10 Some infighting's back in Morocco (4)
11 Hail the opposite effect of 12... (6,4)
12 ...the effect of warming in the main (3-3,7)
15 Used for the first time – it drenches altar, we hear! (10)
18 Thousand leave uncertain state to find old Chinese poet (2,2)
19 Chap puts in unknown retrospective offer for bill (8)
20 Sodium found in no amount of hydrocarbon... (6)
21 ...state of chlorinator affected by encasing sodium (5,8)

Down

1 James, the second fan to follow Israel in complex match (8)
2 Turn over for a strong, hearty recipe (6)
3 Woody or arable mixed... (8)
4 ...grains – the last point exhanged for another which is not so neutral! (2,4)
5 Nazi – churchman and the one German around who follows Hitler (5,8)
6 Statesman and admiral at the head of the French named randomly above (6,7)
7 A group heading after battle to visit African leader (8,5)
13 Sounds like car warehouse is this way (8)
14 State of soil erosion is nil – improving, south excepted (8)
16 Indian city, reportedly, of the interior? (6)
17 Revolutionary worker hidden by fellow (6)

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■	P	R	I	S	O	N	E	R	S	O	F	W	A	R

QUICK

Across

5 European language and people expelled from Canada to settle in Louisiana (7,6)
8 Colombian capital (6)
9 Legendary possible birthplace/deathplace of Arthur (8)
10 Part of Morocco ceded by Spanish Sahara in 1969 (4)
11 Hail-stones (6,4)
12 Action at the poles or continental massifs which is an effect of global warming (3-3,7)
15 Baptized (10)
18 The most famous of ancient Chinese poets (701-762 AD) (2,2)
19 Jawbone or bill (8)
20 Hydrocarbon (C_9H_{20}) – ninth in the methane series (6)
21 One of the original 13 states of America (5,8)

Down

1 Adherent of James II of England (8)
2 Turkish variant of an Eastern rice dish (6)
3 Tree-like or tree-dwelling (8)
4 Ready to motor! (2,4)
5 Nazi organizer of anti-Semitic activities (5,8)
6 Joint-winner of the Nobel Peace Prize, 1993 (6,7)
7 President of Malawi, 1966-94 (8,5)
13 European road system which celebrated the covering of 2,000 miles in 1966 (8)
14 21st state of the Union (1818) (8)
16 Indian city of over 1m, in Madhya Pradesh (6)
17 President of the Jacobin Club, overthrown by Robespierre in 1794 (6)

Nuclear fantasy

Not everyone in India is enthralled by the 'Hindu Bomb'.
Bittu Sahgal reminds us what is at stake.

WORLD Environment Day rolls along every June and many of us whose lives are focused on defending the earth find ourselves contemplating our purpose. At lead-up meetings across India this year a variety of issues featured in animated discussions, from the fate of the almost defunct Narmada Project to that of the tiger.

But a sort of quiet descended whenever the subject of the tests came up. Everyone agreed that the hypocrisy of the US and Britain on the issue was to be condemned. Nevertheless, social activists, environmentalists, teachers, students and even many in business seemed stunned by two key developments. First, the tests themselves and how they were used to garner political advantage; then, the chauvinistic response of the most unlikely sections of society.

It's time to explore the track record of the global nuclear industry, which seems to have been forgotten. Here's a small reminder:

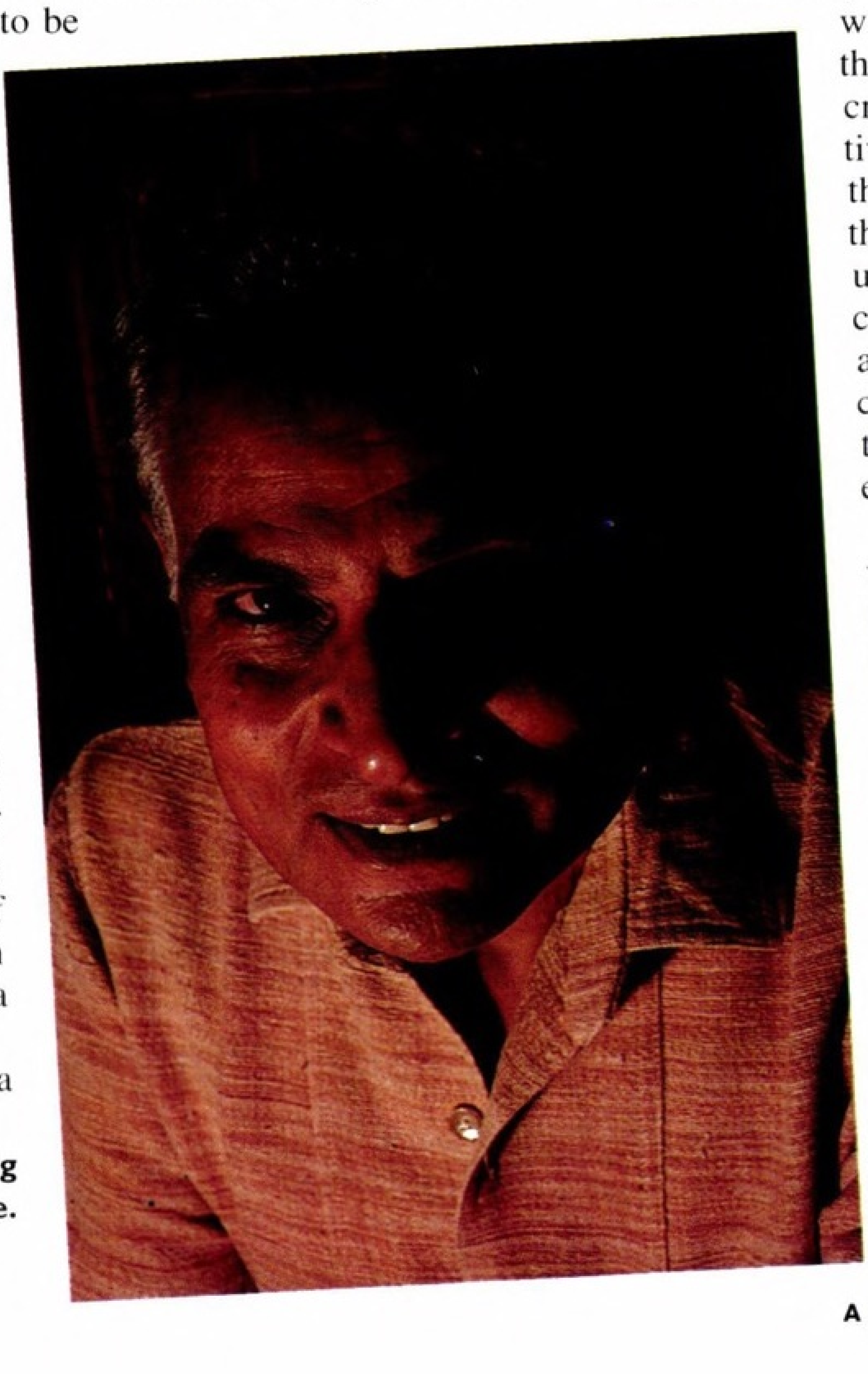
'A bright light filled the plane,' wrote Lt Col Paul Tibbets, the pilot of the Enola Gay, the B-29 that dropped the first atomic bomb. 'We turned back to look at Hiroshima. The City was hidden by that awful cloud... boiling up, mushrooming.' For a moment, no-one spoke. Then everyone was talking. 'Look at that! Look at that! Look at that!' exclaimed the co-pilot, Robert Lewis, pounding on Tibbets' shoulder. Lewis said he could taste atomic fission; it tasted like lead. Then he turned away to write in his journal. 'My God,' he asked himself, 'what have we done?' (*Newsweek* special report, 6 August 1945).

What indeed? More than 200,000 people are known to have died because of the nuclear attack on Japan. No-one knows how many more died unrecorded and unmourned (visit the internet site <http://www.csi.ad.jp/ABOMB/index.html> put up by Mitsuru Ohba and John Benson from Hiroshima for more details).

Remember Chernobyl? It is now common knowledge that the former Soviet Union turned out to be the world's most negligent nuclear power. As India's nuclear program has leaned so heavily on the former Soviet Union, it is reasonable to presume that our safety standards are equally abysmal.

Dhirendra Sharma, who used to teach Science Technology at the Jawaharlal Nehru University in Delhi, informs us that 'in India an estimated 300 incidents of a serious nature have occurred, causing radiation leaks and damage to workers. These have so far remained official secrets... A major mishap in Tarapur in 1979 resulted in thousands of litres of irradiated water gushing out from the reactor. But the Chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission reluctantly acknowledged only a "pinhole" leak.'

In another serious incident a reprocessing plant at Tarapur was closed down due to contamination. It is reported that at least three persons died in the 'inert' chamber inside and more than 3,000 workers have been exposed to non-permissible doses of radiation. The Madras Atomic Power Station Unit-1 at Kalpakkam was reported to have suffered an explosion soon after it was commissioned in July 1984. The Rajasthan Atomic Power Station Unit-1 had to be shut down. More than 2,000 workers were exposed to excess radiation and 300 had to be hospitalized.



Dhirendra Sharma: documenting the nuclear nightmare.

Make no mistake, we are creeping towards a self-inflicted nuclear Armageddon. Alarmingly, attempts are now being made to brand anti-nuclear groups in India as anti-national. An emerging brand of fascism even prompted death threats against protesters in New Delhi this May.

We might therefore do well to pause and consider the myth of cheap atomic power, the handmaiden of nuclear weapons. Our Government presses on, ostrich-like, pretending that nuclear plants can free India from chronic power shortages. But the fact is that our nuclear industry is sick and dying.

> ***Make no mistake, we are creeping towards a self-inflicted nuclear Armageddon***

Surendra Gadekar, leading light of Anumukti, a Gandhian nuclear resistance group, points out that the nuclear dream is really a nightmare. 'The scientists and bureaucrats in charge of our nuclear program are above accountability,' he laments. He and his doctor wife Sangamitra investigated the condition of villagers at Rawatbhatta in Rajasthan, where they discovered gross radiation-related deformities.

This is a story told to Surendra Gadekar. One day in Narora a worker with a geiger counter went to take tea in the canteen. His geiger counter suddenly went crazy. On investigating he found that the radioactivity was coming from the fire used for preparing the tea. Further investigation led to the discovery that the wood being burnt had originally been used for scaffolding inside the plant, and had got contaminated and hence should have been stored as low-level waste. Instead it had been sold to a contractor, who had fortunately sold it back to the canteen: hence this sordid practice of how the establishment deals with its waste was detected.

The birth and death of the nuclear fantasy, which once promised that electricity would be too cheap to meter, has taken place within one human lifetime. But the problems will not go away even if we stop building reactors, because wastes will stay hot for thousands of years.

If the centralized bureaucracy of Maurya Kings two thousand years ago had discovered nuclear power, we in India and Pakistan would probably still be spending half our current national budget storing and caring for or repairing the damage done by atomic wastes.

Now that really is something to think about on World Environment Day. ■

Bittu Sahgal is the Editor of *Sanctuary Magazine*, Mumbai, India, e-mail: bittu@giasbm01.vsnl.net.in

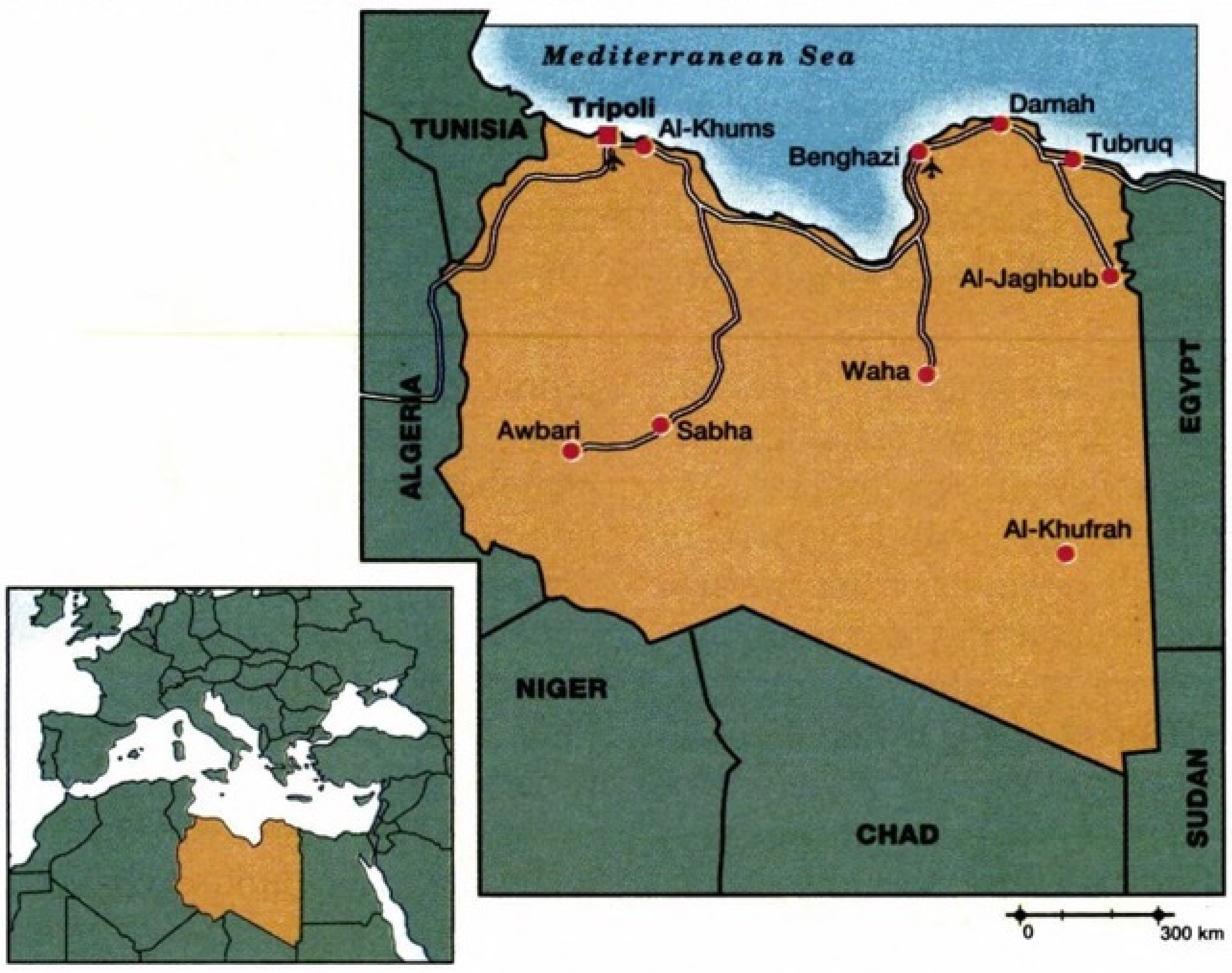
Country profile

Libya

LIBYA is an enigma. Based theoretically on the principle of popular control over all aspects of political life, its system of government looks little different from most of the Arab world's military-backed dictatorships. Its leader, Muammar Qadhafi, is one of the world's best-known and most-disparaged heads of state. And yet, although long singled out for punishment by the US in particular, Libya remains a relatively prosperous country with a system of political institutions which, on the face of it, allow its citizen population a fair degree of involvement in the running of the country.

But Libya is a difficult place to understand. For sure, it is one of the most thinly populated countries in the world, with around 5.5 million people inhabiting some 685,000 square miles, almost all of it semi-desert. It is a vociferous member of the League of Arab States and the Organization of African Unity.

It was taken over by Italy after the defeat of its Turkish masters in World War One and freed by the allies during World War Two. A king was appointed by Britain and France in 1951 and overthrown by a military coup in 1969 led by Colonel Qadhafi. He transformed Libya into a radical, pro-Soviet Arab Socialist state. By 1977 the 'Cultural Revolution' which Qadhafi proclaimed as the vehicle for putting his philosophy into practice had brought about the disbanding of the country's political institutions and their replacement by a pyramid of People's Committees.



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The new political structures, according to many Libyans, gave people a say in political affairs, at least at the parochial level. They also gave Qadhafi and his inner circle a tighter grip on the machinery of state. Much of Libya's political class was alienated from the regime as a result. There is no doubt either that opposition was not well regarded. Imprisonment and the death penalty continue to be meted out to opposition activists in Libya. There is a significant émigré community which, with a good deal of American support, has campaigned actively and loudly against Qadhafi. Nor has the regime shied away from hunting down its political opponents abroad.

Qadhafi seems to operate on the sophisticated premise that his enemies' enemies are his friends. At one time or another he has extended support – sometimes only vocal, sometimes practical – to the likes of Idi Amin, Mobutu, the IRA and Louis Farrakhan. But there is a consistent thread underlying all this: support for liberation movements and perceived anti-imperialist forces, exemplified by steadfast support for the African National Congress.

Whatever one makes of Libya's foreign policy, it has paid dearly for it. It was bombed in 1986 by the US, with British support, for no apparent sensible reason; effectively framed – many now believe – for the murder of a police officer in London two years earlier; and finally blamed for the Lockerbie bombing in 1988 and subjected to both UN and US unilateral sanctions.

Nonetheless, thanks to oil, Libyans enjoy the highest standard of living in Africa. Developed from the mid-1950s, production of high-grade Libyan crude passed one million barrels per day in 1982. Its reserves are estimated at over 20 billion barrels, enough to last over 40 years at present rates of extraction. Diversification into other areas has been slow, however. And the country relies very heavily on imports in virtually every other sphere. Its economy appears to be managed well enough to stave off the popular discontent and resultant pressure on the regime that it was expected sanctions would cause. ■

Steve Sherman

AT A GLANCE

JON SPAULL / PANOS PICTURES

Leader: Muammar Qadhafi.

Economy: GNP per capita estimated at $5,500 (Aotearoa/New Zealand $14,340).

Monetary unit: Dinar = 1,000 dirhams.

Main exports: oil, natural gas and derivatives; gypsum.

Main imports: nearly everything else.

People: 5.5 million.

Health: Infant mortality 50 per 1,000 live births (Aotearoa/New Zealand 7 per 1,000 live births).

Culture: Mostly Arab; much of the population is urban, with peasant farmers in the north and nomadic cattle and camel breeders in the south and east.

Language: Arabic, except for small Berber groups scattered around the country.

Religion: Sunni Muslim.

Sources: *The World Guide 1997/1998; The State of the World's Children 1998.*

Previously profiled November 1987

NI star rating	
EXCELLENT	★★★★★
GOOD	★★★★
FAIR	★★★
POOR	★★
APPALLING	★

STAR RATINGS

INCOME DISTRIBUTION ★★★
Figures are hard to come by, but there is little conspicuous sign of either great wealth or substantial poverty.
1987 ★★★

LITERACY ★★
No really marked improvement, at 76% (Canada 97%).
1987 ★★★

SELF-RELIANCE ★★
Very heavy reliance on imported goods.
1987 ★★

FREEDOM ★★
Ostensibly, political institutions exist to allow people a say in running their lives. But the reality is less impressive.
1987 ★★

POSITION OF WOMEN ★★★
Better than most in the Arab world.
1987 ★★★

LIFE EXPECTANCY ★★★
At 65 years (Canada 79 years) improving along with worldwide trends.
1987 ★★★

POLITICS

NI ASSESSMENT ★★
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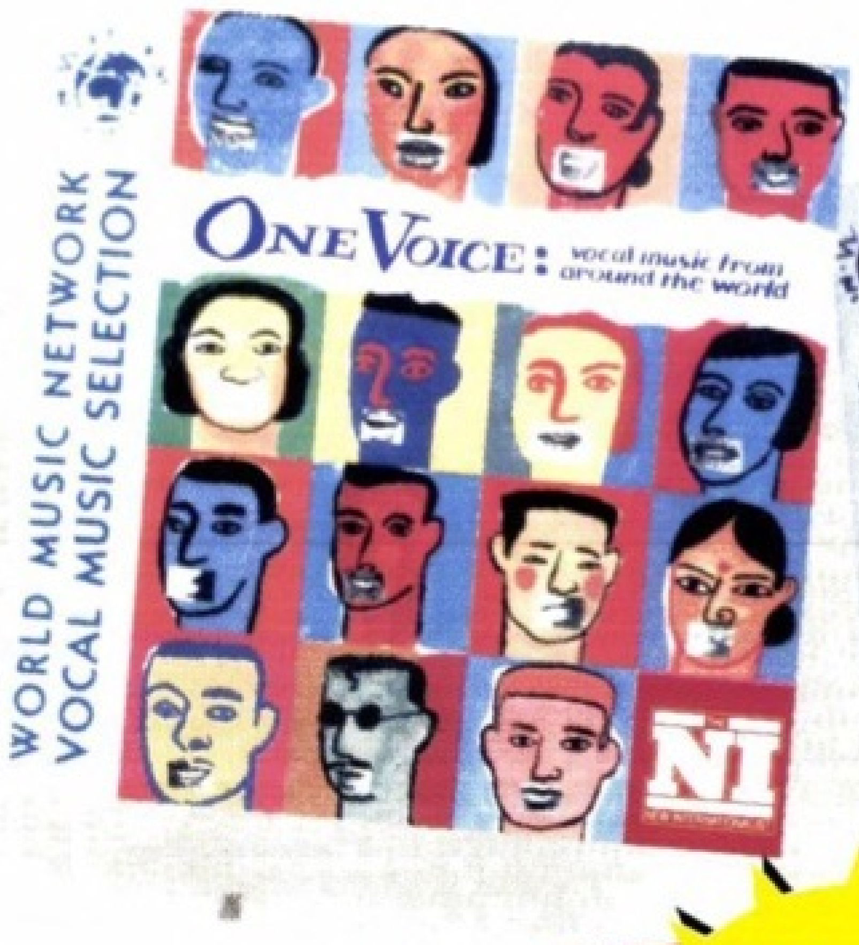
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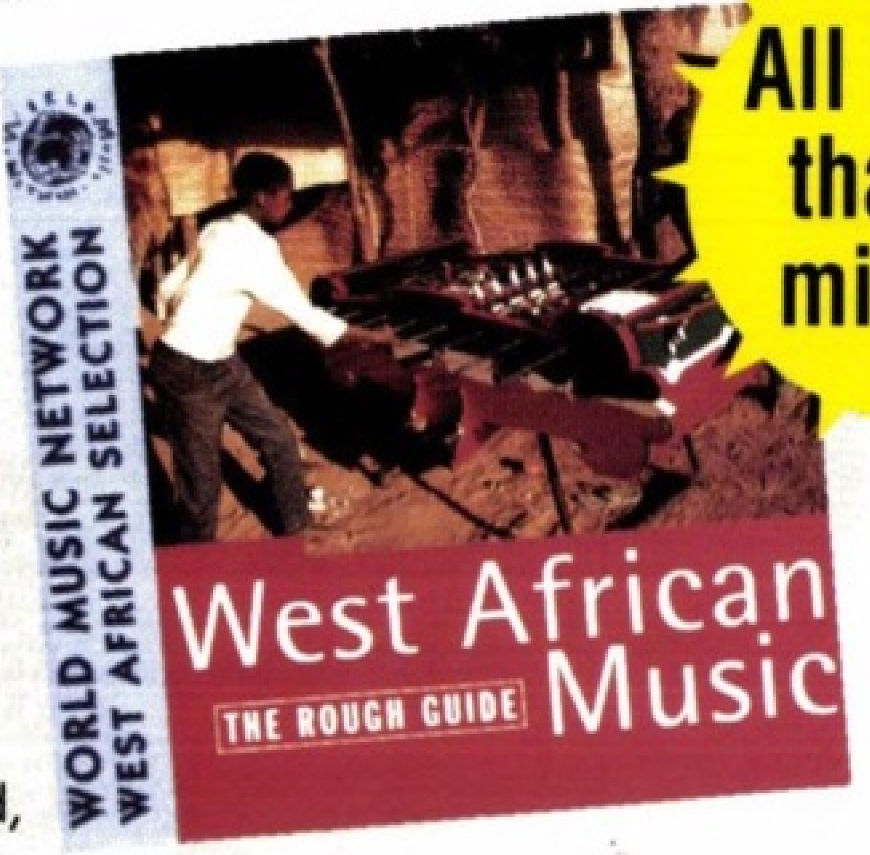
"A fantastic start for discovering new music from Africa" **PREVIEW (UK)**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Portugal - The Rough Guide

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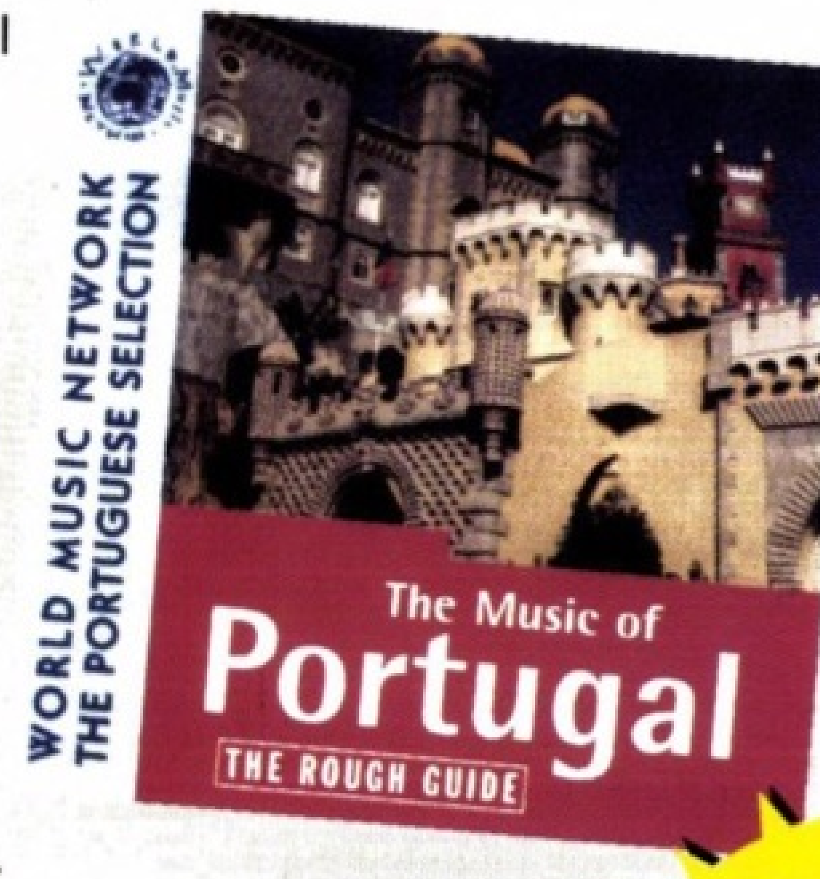
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Flamenco - The Rough Guide

Flamenco is one of the great musical forms of Europe whose huge resurgence has seen its popularity reach out far beyond its Andalucian homeland. With examples of many styles including Solea, Tango, Malaguena and Buleria, and featuring flamenco's greatest artists such as Enrique Morente, Paco De Lucia and Carmen Linares.

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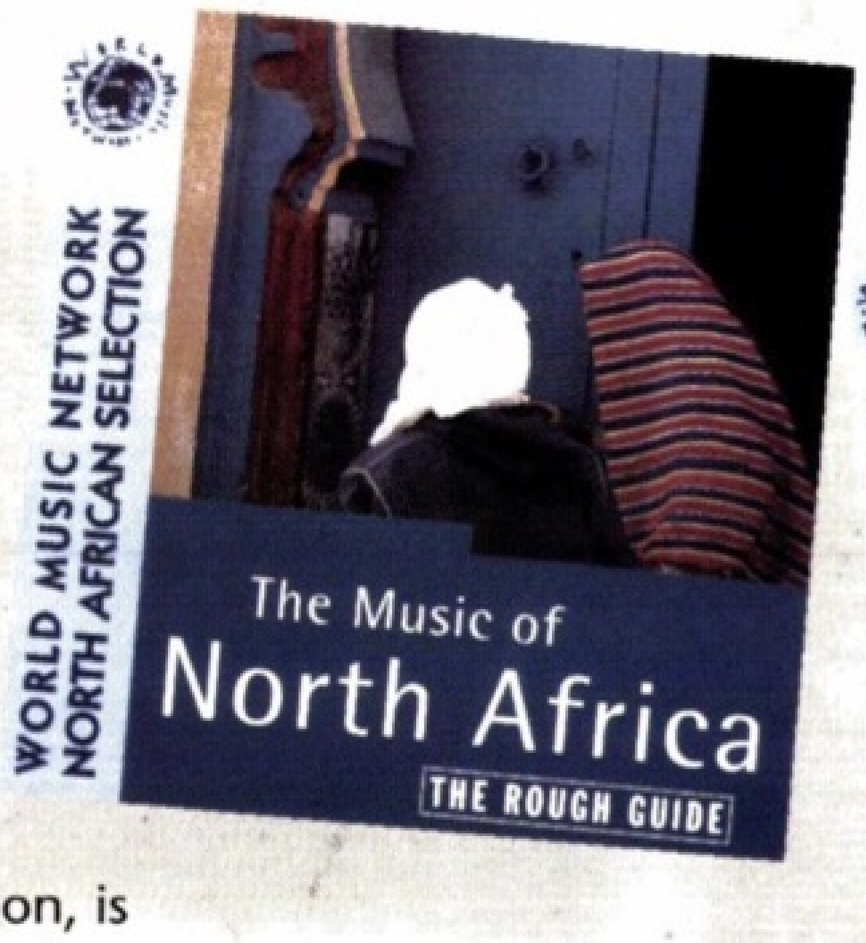
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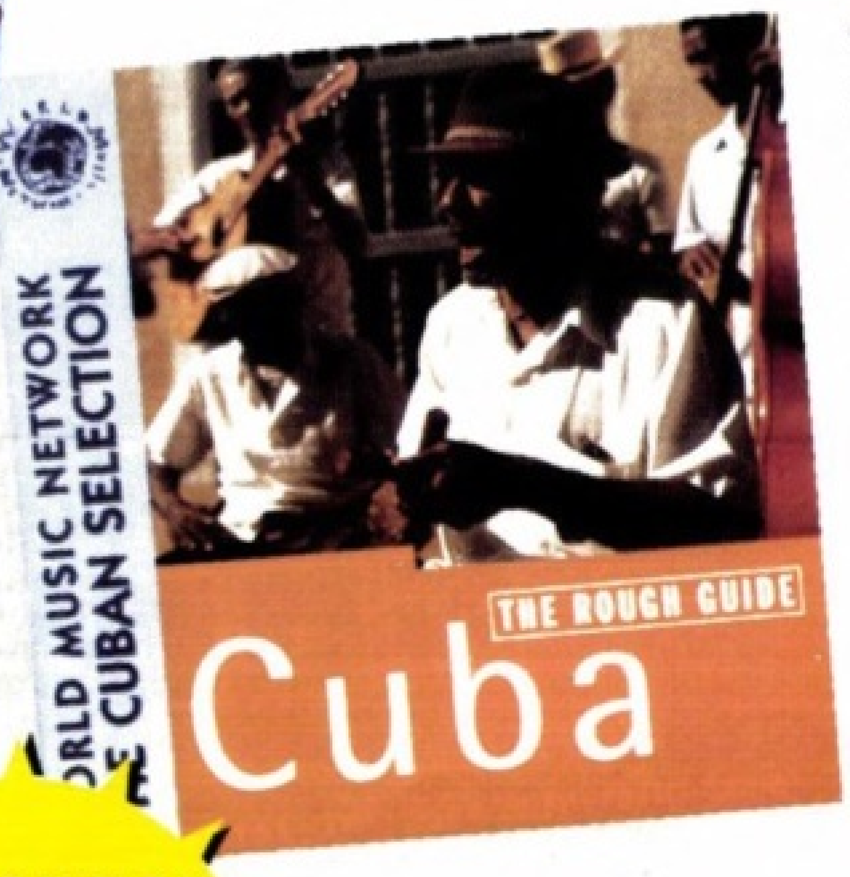
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Brazil - The Rough Guide

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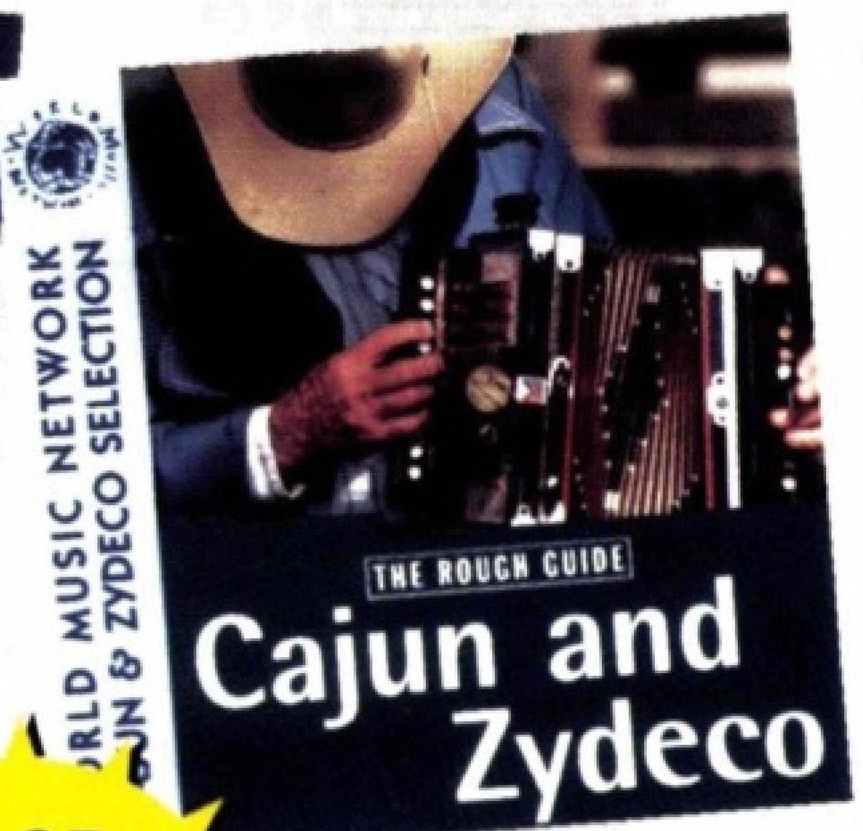
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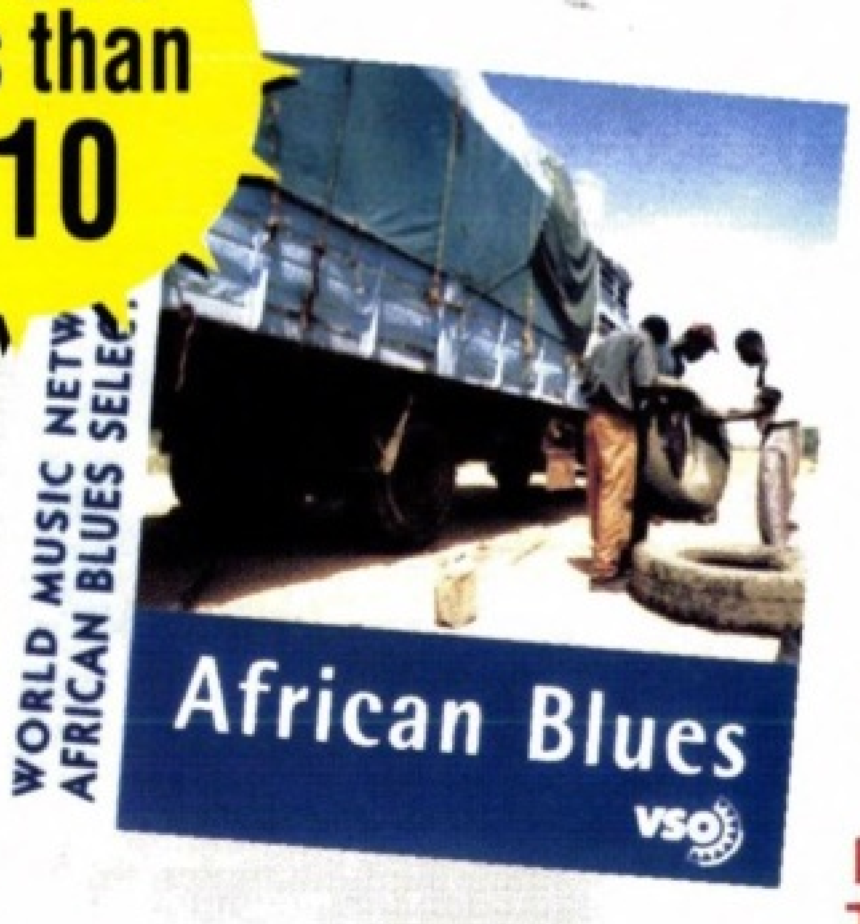
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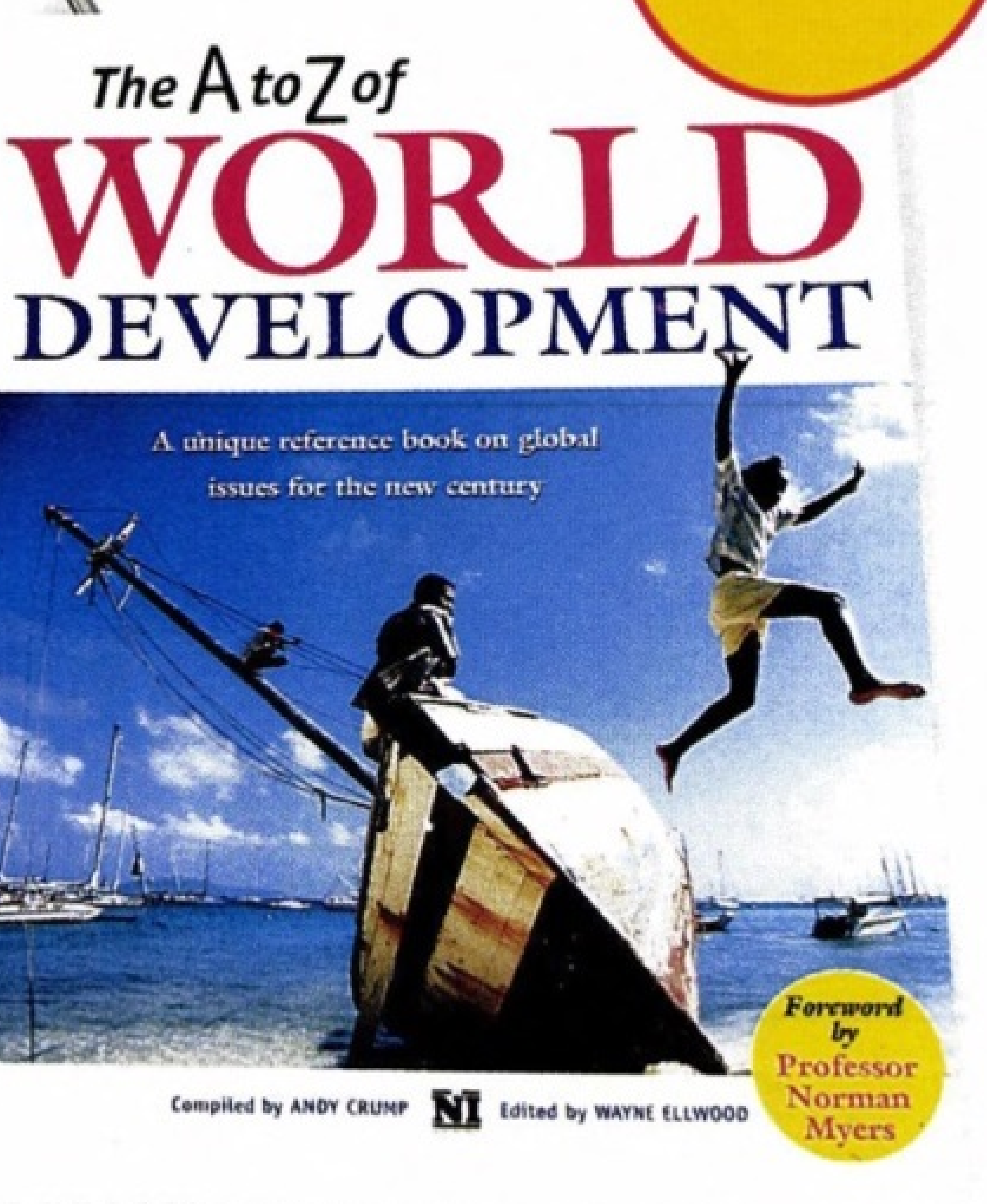
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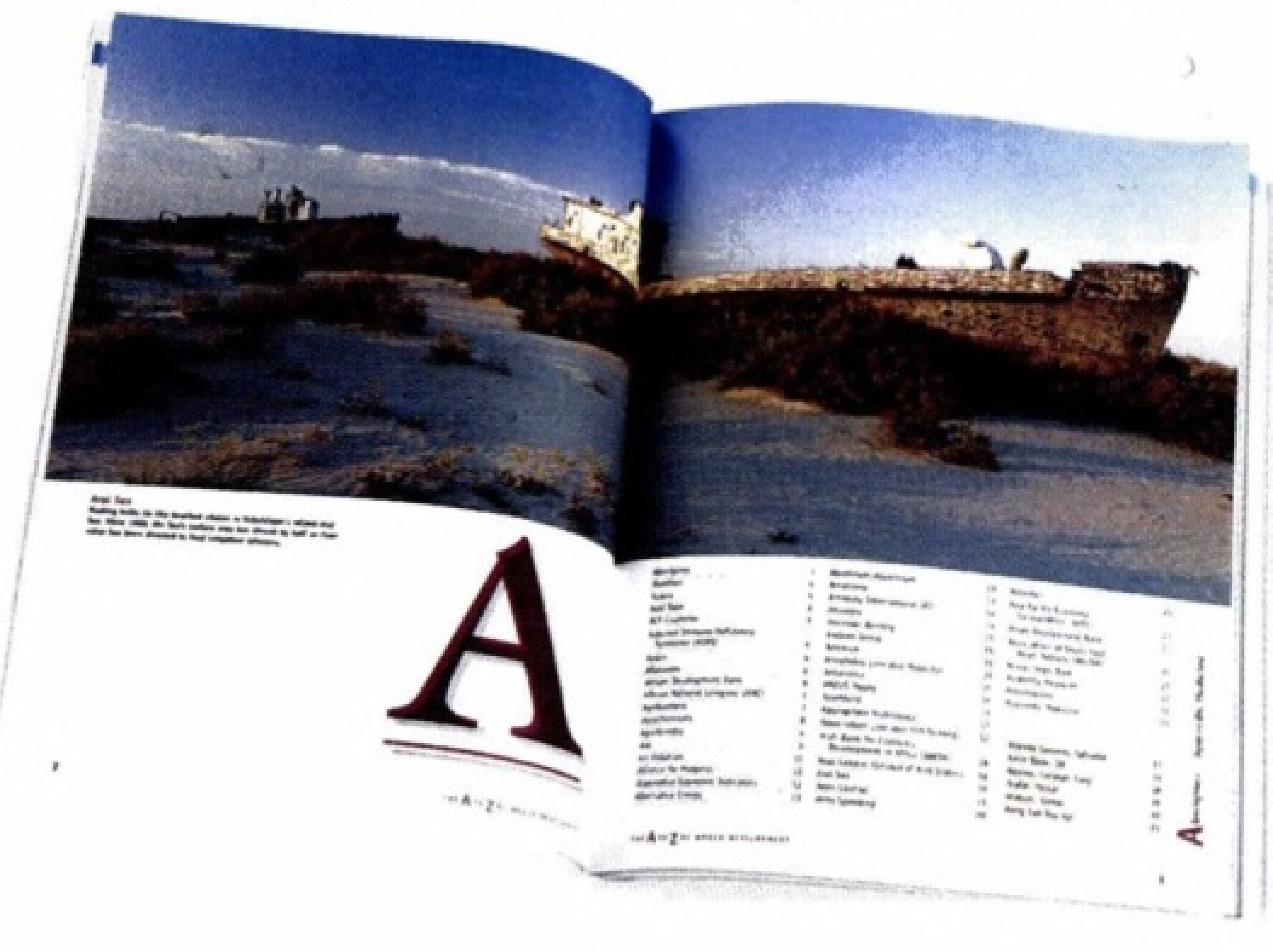

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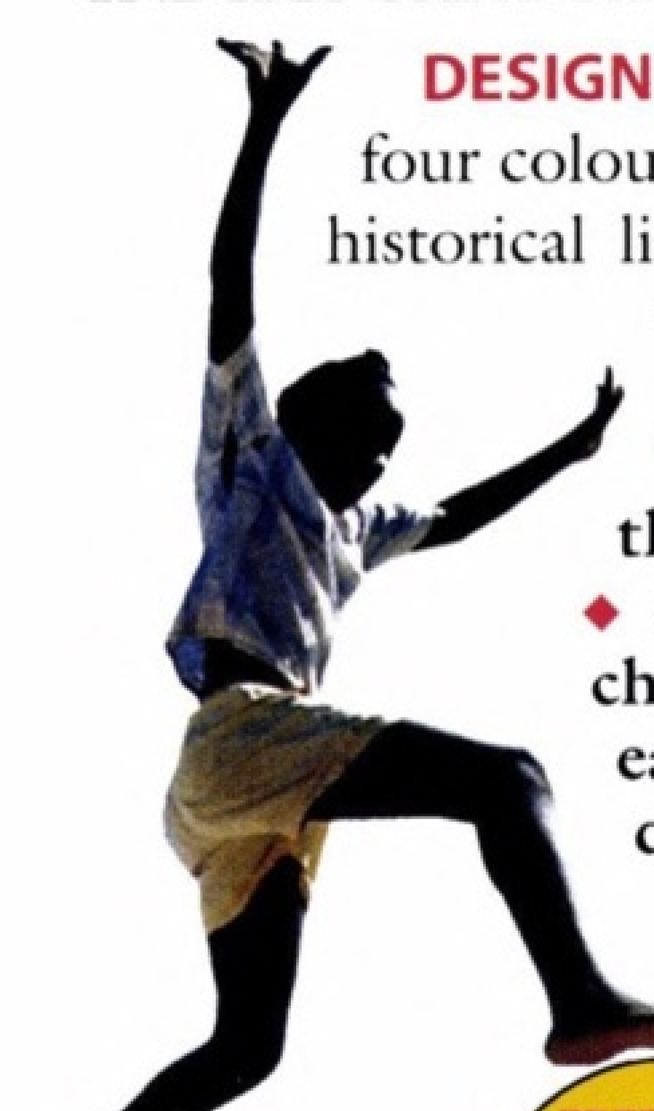

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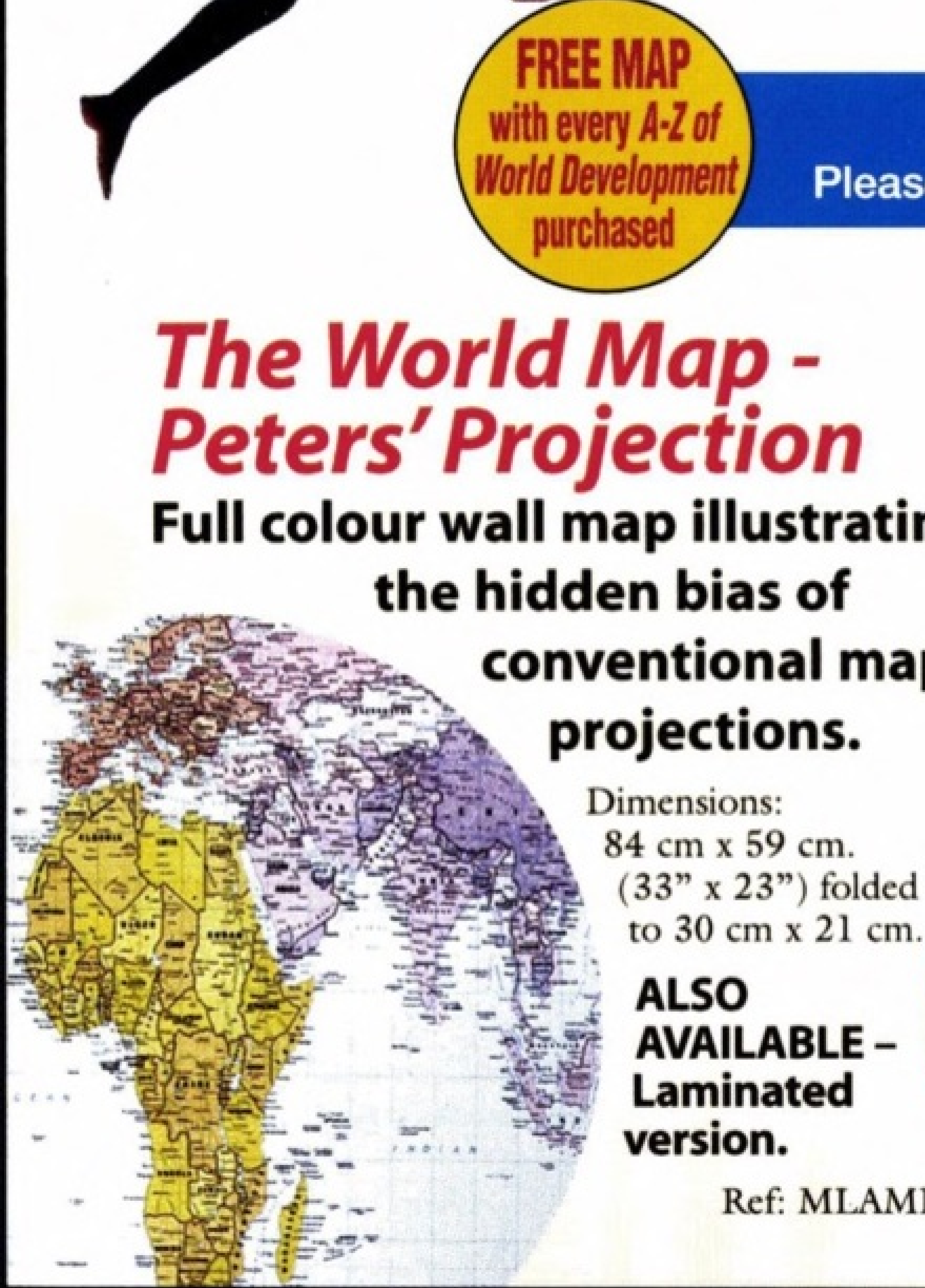

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